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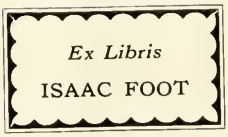

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WHERE ENGLAND SETS HER FEET

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LAKE OF WINE

A JAY OF ITALY

JEMMY ABERCRAW

THE POT OF BASIL

THE STORY OF FIFINE

MOLL DAVIS

ETC. ETC.

WHERE ENGLAND SETS HER FEET

A ROMANCE

BY

BERNARD CAPES

'Whate'er the bans the wind may waft her,
England's true men are we and Pope's men after.'

LONDON: 48 PALL MALL
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TO

GARETH WILFRID CAPES

LIEUT. HAMPSHIRE REGT. IN PALESTINE

THIS EARLIER STORY OF

'ENGLAND'S TRUE MEN'

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE PRETTY PLEDGE	1
II.	THE PLEDGE REDEEMED	4
III.	THE JOURNEY WEST	22
IV.	THE END OF THE JOURNEY	40
V.	THE HOUSE BY THE MOOR	46
VI.	SOME NEW FRIENDS	59
VII.	THE OLD WELL HOUSE	73
VIII.	THE APPARITION	84
IX.	TRANSFORMATION	90
X.	CONFIDENCES	99
XI.	TWO'S COMPANY	108
XII.	IL PENSEROSO	117
XIII.	DESOLATION	123
XIV.	AN EMOTION AND A DISCOVERY	129
XV.	THE RETURN OF THE WANDERERS	138
XVI.	THE TRUTH AT LAST	145
XVII.	CERTAIN VISITORS	154
XVIII.	HOPE DEFERRED	172

CHAP.		PAGE
XIX.	MARKING TIME	187
XX.	MISTRESS JOAN MEDLEY . . .	194
XXI.	THE DECOY	208
XXII.	A POIGNANT INTERVIEW . . .	218
XXIII.	HOME AGAIN	232
XXIV.	COMMITTED	238
XXV.	THE FUGITIVE	248
XXVI.	AN INCUBUS	256
XXVII.	THE VOYAGE	270
XXVIII.	THE TAKING OF THE CARACK . .	288
XXIX.	THE VIPER ON THE HEARTH . .	299
XXX.	L'ALLEGRO	310
XXXI.	'BACK TO A WORLD OF DEATH' .	322
XXXII.	RETRIBUTION	326
XXXIII.	BEREAVEMENT	338
XXXIV.	A LAST DISCOVERY . . .	349

CHAPTER I

THE PRETTY PLEDGE

When, in the second year of Elizabeth, the Act of Supremacy was passed, there were found only some two hundred in all of the clergy bold enough to dissent from it. Many, it is true, who conformed, did so without sincerity, fearing to lose their livings, and of these was Mr Robert Angell, Vicar of Clapham, or Clappenham village in Surrey, which was in the advowson of the lords of Larkhall and a very good cure. This Mr Angell, a worthy but weak divine, gained nothing, however, by his accommodation, for being suspected, whether rightly or wrongly, of Romanist sympathies, he was shortly deprived of his benefice, and forced to look elsewhere than to the Establishment for a means to subsistence. In this pass he bethought himself to set up a little private school, or palestra, for the sons of such of his neighbours as were well disposed towards him; and this he did, and with fair success, many coming to receive of him their early grounding in the A.B.C.-darius, Lily's grammar, the *Sententiæ Pueriles*, and so on by way of Erasmus's Colloquies to Cæsar and the Georgics, so that they were well ripe for College and University when their time came. For the Vicar was a sound scholar no less than an amiable man, and ruled by love without much authority, being little addicted to the harsh methods which obtained, and indeed were expected, in his day. He had a dame, a

stupid woman but as benevolent as himself, and two or three little children, who tumbled up anyhow and were for ever in hot water, save when they most needed it.

Now to these was presently added another, a stranger, who came to board and lodge with the household when he was no more than a babe in years. His name was Brion Middleton, and he was brought in person, by one Mr Justice Bagott of the Queen's Bench, thenceforth to be and remain a member of the Angel curriculum until otherwise notified, and eke to form an item of the Angell family—a minute 'paying guest', as we should now describe him. He had no parents to speak of; nor did the overbearing Justice deem it necessary to speak of them, imposing the lovely brat, without any leave asked or given, on the clergyman, over whom, it seemed, he possessed a certain hold. For so he asserted that, having professional cognizance of those Papish proclivities which had already broken the poor man, he could very well use it, if he chose, to bring about his utter destruction; which claim might or might not be true, yet in any event was supererogatory, seeing that the divine was far too meek a soul ever to question into, much less reject, the service so truculently demanded of him. Indeed, of his charity, no less than for his potential profit, he welcomed it; observing which the manner of the visitor changed, and, abating much of his imperiousness, which he found uncalled for, he proceeded forthwith in gentler speech to discuss the terms and provisions of the accommodation he desired for this derelict infant 'ward' of his. Planned on no grudging scale, these were to imply a virtual, if indefinite adoption by the couple, who were

to do their best by their charge, make no curious inquiries regarding him, and expect no communications whatever save such as turned upon the periodic remittances for his keep, which would arrive duly dated from the Judge's own office in Gray's Inn. For the rest the boy was to be brought up as one of the Vicar's own family, and in all respects given the dues of gentle birth. Having pronounced which ultimatum the visitor, casting not one look on the little wide-eyed whimpering infant, departed, as he had come, by night.

'Poor curst imp of destiny!' cried the clergyman, in a burst of emotion, when the other was gone.

'Thou pretty, pretty pledge of a misguided love!' cried his admiring lady, gazing on the babe. And then they looked at one another guiltily.

'This,' says he, 'is already to break the spirit of the compact. Henceforth, silence—if for no other reason, Dame, because he hath us in his toils.'

She sighed, and caught the child to her bosom. 'These be my toils,' said she. 'I will hold my tongue, lest by loosing it I loose them.'

This happened in the year 1560, and thereafter for the space of thirteen summers, his numbering but two when he arrived, Brion abode and throve sweetly under that friendly roof.

CHAPTER II

THE PLEDGE REDEEMED

And for thirteen years the silence imposed upon that complaisant couple was faithfully observed by them. They adhered to the letter of their bond, neither seeking nor desiring information as to their charge, content, and soon for his own sake, to accept him, and love him, and contrive for him to the utmost extent of their ability. And he, for his part, repaid their devotion, growing a shapely slip in their midst, and developing as he grew a disposition as endearing as his form was attractive and his mind alert. He was a bright child, with a power of observance behind a staid manner, and a suspicion of humour twinkling under a gravity that seemed always to measure before it spoke. He had a respect for his foster-parents, as one may call them, tempered in the lady's case with an inclination to laughter, and for both of them a well-deserved affection. And they, being under no directions but to treat him as one of their own progeny, were fain, nevertheless, to observe towards him a certain deference in their manner, due, as it were, to the entertainment of a mystery, and to concede to him as by right of birth a preference over their offspring, which were three in number, namely Gregory, Richard, and the little Alse the youngest. With these he grew from childhood, being regarded by them as an orphan of some unknown distinction, which, however, after the ways of youth,

he was very ready to waive and they to disregard. They were all good comrades together, whether in school or sport, and shared, at least as regarded the boys, a fine spirit of adventure.

Now, during all this period, never, save once, was the ban of excommunication, as regarded the outside world, lifted; and then only for a brief moment; but faithfully to each quarter-day arrived a messenger from Gray's Inn, bearing in a leathern bag the fourth of the allowance agreed upon for the child's accommodation. That was ample, rather than sufficient, for his needs, which were to include in all respects the furniture of a gentleman, while leaving to his adopters a generous margin of profit. But, indeed, good souls, they took small advantage of the concession, barely, of their love, recouping themselves for the expenses to which they were put on his behalf, whom they were resolute to regard as naturally entitled to a style and consideration superior to their own. Wherefore the little Brion always went arrayed like a noble, while Gregory and the others must be content with the simpler dress of their condition, a fact which had alone sufficed to appoint him their leader, even were his boldness and quickness of invention less than they were.

And so he lived and learned, being trained without severity and indulged without hurt, a mystery and object of curiosity to the neighbours, with whom, nevertheless, scandal could get no hold, seeing that the Vicar himself, even had he been inveigled into telling, had nothing to tell. The child had been brought by an uncommunicative stranger, was there, and that was all. For the rest, the business was a lawyer's business.

Now, it was somewhere about the boy's sixth year

when occurred that momentary lifting and dropping of the veil referred to; and by then whatever memories of a brief past he had brought with him into exile had long flickered into extinction. For all that survived to his mind he might have drawn his first breath in the house to which destiny had consigned him.

This house stood a little off the great west road by which the Queen's Majesty would sometimes travel from Westminster to her Palace of Richmond in Surrey. It was a reasonably modest building, meet to the circumstances of an unbeneficed cleric, but with a pleasant garden croft attached, as well as an orchard, and a paddock which served for a playground. A bridle-track went from it down to the road, where was a swing-gate; and it was here that Brion, returning alone from an errand voluntarily run for his good-natured foster-mother—in whose unmethodicalness and forgetfulness he took, even thus early, a chuckling amusement—came for the first time upon the man who brought, though the boy did not know it, the periodic instalments of pieces to pay for his keep. Seeing him, he stopped, and the two looked at one another.

They looked, and the man's face took on a queer expression, arrested and questioning. His eyes were light jellies, with pupils that somehow reminded Brion of the black staring pits in the frog-spawn he was used to fish out of the ponds. He was extraordinarily lank and bony, though with a suggestion of sinewy swagger about him that was quite impressive until one examined his features; and then conviction halted. They seemed to betray an odd mixture of impudence and weakness, the two seeming epitomised, as it were, in the near conjunction of a slack mouth and an inverted moustache

brushed boldly up from it to meet the nostrils of a long down-drooping nose. He wore a black bonnet with a short feather in in, and hose, breeches, and curtmanteau all black, as befitted a lawyer's deputy. On his body was a peascod breastplate, more dull than polished, a short sword hung at his thigh, and he bestrode a heavy Flanders horse, plainly caparisoned. He had been in the act of dismounting at the moment of the boy's appearance, but, seeing him, subsided again into his saddle and sat staring.

Suddenly, as if to some instinct, he pulled off his cap and louted to the little fellow, who responded with a grave 'Good-morrow, stranger.'

'Good-morrow, my brave little master,' answered the man, and bent over as if to signify his desire for a closer confidence (his voice, Brion noticed, had a queer high huskiness in it, like a rusty hinge with an intermittent squeak). 'A word in your ear,' says he, behind his hand, and in a forced whisper. ''Tis one Master Robert Angell that I seek. You'll not know, perchance, where he inhabits?'

Brion smiled, and pointed up the bridle path. The stranger sat up, drawing back his shoulders and stiffening his neck, like one happily confirmed in a surmise. 'Ha!' said he, and stooped again. 'I should like a word with him.'

'I'll tell him,' said the boy. 'I live there myself, you know.'

The stranger was amazed and gratified. 'Who,' he said, 'would have laid on such a leap-frog chance now! I take a back at random, and lo, 'tis a back-friend!' All the time he spoke his spots of pupils never ceased to probe the face beneath him. He

observed its eyes—to which the sight of lethal weapons were as yet little familiar—fix themselves curiously on his sword. 'Ah!' he said; you are there, are you?' and slapped the hilt with his gauntleted hand. 'Mayst have as good a friend thyself one day, little master.'

'I will have a rapier,' said Brion, 'and a baselard with a sheath of red to hang at my waist.'

'And so thou shalt, by token of thy gentility,' cried the stranger. 'Of scarlet cuirbouilli shall it be, and on it a device of bears with rubies set for eyes.'

'How has your sword been a friend to you?' asked Brion.

'How!' cried the other. 'Why, as friends go—a champion at need, true as steel, quick to interpose between myself and danger.' He whisked out the blade, so as to make it hiss. 'Hearest?' he demanded. "What is toward?" it whispers—"some lurking knave, a damsel in distress, an insult to avenge? Slid! but I'll answer for you and to the point." It is a friend, I say; a watchdog with a tooth that it hath whetted on a twenty-score of rib-bones in its time. Mark you its edge.'

'It is a clean edge,' said Brion. 'From its newness it might have been bought yesterday.'

The stranger looked a trifle disconcerted.

'Not so,' he answered. 'It is its temper—ha! I tell you, young master, it hath drunk blood like six-shilling beer, and knocked on more breast-bones——'

His voice went out of him with a chuckle. There at the gate, come unnoticed over the grass, stood the ex-Vicar, weak astonishment in his eyes.

'Master Clerivault!' quoth he. 'What brings you here, and, out of your wont, by day?'

He had on a black cassock, but green with age; his shoes were tied with string; one flap of his bonnet stood up, the other down; his pale, mild head, like a calf's, lay on his ruff as it were on an unwashed platter. Good Mrs Angell, the blowzed and ineffectual, would rebuke him for his untidiness, as she straightened her own tumbled coiffure, or appeared with her kirtle on the wrong side before. It was that sort of thing which tickled little Brion hugely.

The stranger, first re-sheathing his blade, blew a kiss from his finger tips, half affable, half mocking.

'I will acquaint you, worthy Master Angell,' he answered: 'only—I prithee; there's a proverb anent the ears of little pitchers. *Acta exteriora*, as we say in the law, *indicant interiora secreta*. You smoke me?'

'Child,' said the puzzled pedagogue, turning to Brion, 'your message lingers while you wait.'

He waved his hand, and the boy went on to the house. '*What* hidden secrets?' thought the youngster, for at six one, in Eliza's time, could translate Latin. Something, some ghost of a mystery concerning himself, which would haunt his subconscious perceptives even now occasionally, seemed to rise within him. It brought with it a confused memory of other things and other places, but too unreal to be localised, and dissipated almost as soon as felt. So also faded his momentary perplexity over the stranger's pretence of asking his way, when all the time, it appeared, he and his foster-father were well acquainted. It was the sword which remained in his mind. He would have liked to ask more questions about that and its sanguinary adventures.

The Dame, hot and overcome from battling with

malapert kitchen wenches, met him with uplifted hands: 'Why, loveling! and as I am a sinner there was no need to despatch thee, seeing as I never lended Mrs Dapper the recipe after all, but found it in the cupboard where it wont to lie. Come hither, that we measure lips, poor lamb; and so forgive me.'

In the meanwhile, down by the gate, the stranger had stated his business, and the divine acquiesced in it, much as it bewildered that honest old head.

'It shall be done, Master Clerivault,' he said, 'even as you direct. The child shall be there; though for the why or the wherefore I am in no sort to concern myself.'

'Spoken wisely,' said the stranger, 'and in good earnest of the trust which, from the first, hath well reposed itself in thee. Discretion is long life; what thou seest see, but draw no conclusion from it, lest, like the fool's fen-candle, it lure thee in the mire. *Dictum sapienti:* I have said. A brave child, master, and a fair credit to his guardians. Farewell.'

He kissed his glove, with a very Malvolio simper, turned his horse's head for London, and rode away.

Now it was announced by the pedagogue on the following morning that her Majesty was to travel that day by road for Richmond; wherefore all were to don of their best, and, standing together by the wayside, salute her Grace in proper respect as she passed with her train. It was an occasion not the first of its kind, and, like an earlier one, full of excitement and expectancy. Great preparation there was, the little scholars all arriving in their smartest; and indeed when collected they made a pretty group. Only one was wanting, and that was Brion. As the time for the Queen's coming

approached, Mr Angell, taking the boy aside, had bade him follow him by a private path which discharged them into the highway at a point some quarter of a mile westward of the house, and, from its position, well out of range of any chance espial. And this they did, and stood waiting, the elder in some agitation, the younger much marvelling in his baby mind that he was separated from his comrades, and allotted a distinction he could well have done without. However, he was of a philosophical temperament, and averse from denying a meaning to things because he did not understand them.

It was the month of June, and a sweet merry day, with a wind like laughter blowing among the road-side flowers. And of a keeping with its cheeriness was the child, gay under all his sleek sobriety. His doublet was of white satin, puffed at the shoulders as if they were budding into wings, and so were his breeches, all being seamed with black velvet having a marvellous pattern in gold thread embroidered on it. His little cloak was of black velvet lined with white; white were his hose, and white his shoe-roses of lace with a gold thread in it; and in his *copotain* hat was a white feather which the wind ruffled like froth. He was fair and pale, without insipidity—a delicate picture.

Now the two had not long to wait before there came to them a sound of distant shrill acclamation; by which they knew that her Majesty was arrived and that the little scholars were cheering her as she passed. And indeed within a minute or so there hove into sight along the road the first of the procession that accompanied her, being a cavalcade of gentlemen of the Queen's guard, handsome in buff and steel, curiously adorned,

in that martial connexion, with ribbons and tassels of gold. Upon whom followed such a miscellaneous company of knights and ladies as it is impossible to discriminate; nor can one describe the gorgeous flood of them in that narrow way, save as a river discharged from the very vats of Tyre, and staining its whole course with a thousand dyes. So, all mounted, they sparkled by, flashing and chattering; and many remarked the little boy, and blew him smiling kisses. Palanquins there were, bearing high ladies; and falconers, and hounds running in leash, and a solemn jester riding an ass; and all along, enclosing the concourse, went a double file of pikemen—and then at once, the Queen.

Her Majesty, who loved to exhibit herself to her people, travelled in an open horse litter, the gilded poles of which were borne by four red Galloways, near stifled under their housings of cloth of gold, and led each one at his bridle by a golden groom. The roof over her head, supported on shining rods, was emblazoned with an intricate device of lions caught in roses, the sheen whereof struck down upon her hair, which was very fine and thin, and made of it a misty flame. In the entering sunlight her face, so pale was it, looked like tinted silver, the eyes of staring agate, as if she were some carried idol; but the high vivacity of her glance, on nearer seeing, dispelled that illusion. She was in her thirty-first year at this time, and all grace and ingratiation; but resolved to play the Queen no less in her outward trappings than in her inward conscience. Wherefore she outdid all in the magnificence and extravagance of her costume, being so cased and bombasted in costly materials of all sorts, and so roped

and sewn with gems, that she bore no resemblance to the human form, but appeared, as she would have desired, a shape apart, a star unique and without peer. By her side rode four or five of the great lords, waiting on what words she chose to speak, and in her royal wake followed first her led barb, in case she were minded to mount, and afterwards a repetition of the former silken concourse, a Company of the guards closing all. So she shone into view of four bedazzled eyes, and cast a ray of her graciousness, with a nod and smile, on the little standing boy.

Brion never forgot that smile, nor the strange episode, so startling by contrast, which succeeded. The procession went by, and passed, and taking a bend of the road was lost to sight; and then, gazing up in his master's face, he assumed dumbly that they were to return home. But the pedagogue, answering the look nervously, told him to tarry yet a little while, lest perchance some late stragglers should follow and be missed by them. And so, indeed, it turned out; for there appeared presently, coming unhasted along the road, a gentleman and his lady, who, it seemed, had lagged behind the stream, or so far failed to join it. They rode leisurely, looking about them, until, espying the couple standing there, the lady, it seemed, gave a little start, and, speaking to her companion, the two came on and drew rein, as if carelessly, close over against the waiting pair. Brion could have thought some sign of intelligence passed between the gentleman and Mr Angell; but his attention was immediately drawn to the lady, who was dwelling on him with a very strange expression. She was pale and sad to look at, like chastened youth, but of so sweet a cast of

features that he loved her then and there. In years she might have numbered some six less than her cavalier—who was a man of thirty-three thereabouts—as surely as in attractiveness she exceeded him; for though he was a bold and handsome man, and carried the splendour of his apparel with a great air, there was such a look of craft and hardness in his eyes as discounted all the rest. He sat impatiently, as if unwillingly conceding something to a weakness; but he too stared at the boy, and with strange unfriendly vision, which yet seemed to find something whimsical in their object.

The lady leaned from her saddle, murmuring:—

'A very flower to greet us by the way. Hast seen the sweet Queen pass by, my babe?'

The word seemed to linger on her lips. She gazed at Brion as if she would have devoured him.

He answered: 'Yes, Madam; but thou art the prettier.'

She put her finger to her lips, while the gentleman laughed.

'Hush!' she said. 'Talk'st treason, my pretty one. Shall I be thy first lover, then? Mount hither, while I buss thee.'

Mr Angell put his hands under the child's armpits, and lifted him up.

'Set thy little foot in the stirrup,' said the lady, and she wound an arm about him, and, holding him tightly, first searched him in the face, then pressed her lips to his. 'Art happy?' she whispered in his ear, and something seemed to trickle down his cheek. 'Yes, Madam,' he answered in likewise low, for in his heart he felt this to be a confidence. 'That is well,'

she whispered back; and at that moment there was a sound of returning hoofs on the road, and a varlet came spurring towards them and drew up close beside.

'My Lord of Leicester,' said the man: 'the Queen's Majesty asks for you.'

The gentleman held a riding switch in his hand: he put heel to his horse, approached the messenger, and slashed the thong with a vicious oath across his face. His teeth showed, and the wings of his nose lifted like a cat's. The fellow swayed, almost blinded, and near lost his seat.

'That is to learn thee discretion,' quoth his master; and turned to the lady. 'Hearest? Drop that brat and give rein.'

She complied hurriedly, returning Brion to his guardian. The boy was pale, and his lip quivered. His young looks spoke hatred of the cruel act.

'What!' cried the gentleman, quite smoothly and pleasantly, noting that expression: 'wouldst dare me, by-slip?'

'No, no,' said the lady: 'he meant it not. Take him away, good Sir. There, we be going.'

She put her horse between, and smiled, with difficulty, in the face of her comrade. He, for his part, laughed, shrugging contemptuous shoulders; then, before he went, turned with one look on the pedagogue.

'*Cave ursum*,' said he, and no more, but, with a threatening and comprehensive gesture of his hand, imposed silence on those trembling lips. And with that they departed all three, the lady not once looking round, and in a little were lost to view.

'Who were they, Sir?' says Brion, his baby breast

still full to tears with the agitation of it all. But the other put the question away hurriedly.

'I know not, child; we are not to consider; forget it all and dismiss the matter from thy mind and memory.'

But that Brion could not altogether do, though, being a reserved and somewhat silent boy, he never spoke of the incident, not even to his kind stupid foster-mother, but kept the thought of it to himself, locked in his little breast. And there it lay, like a flower in a secret cabinet, fading and withering till it was little more than a faint sweet memory, suggesting something infinitely tender but forgotten; and the face of the beautiful pale lady receded in his mind to a distant dream.

He saw the Queen after this, and more than once, travelling with her Court to Richmond—latterly in a great chariot, like a catafalque on wheels, only then first coming into use—but at these times he stood among the other scholars, and, though at first he would look for the lady, never again did he mark her; and gradually, absorbed more and more into the interests of boyhood, he forgot all about the episode.

So the years passed with him until he was fifteen; and never grew boy to that age in a happier atmosphere. He was loved by his preceptor, petted by his lady, popular with their children and the others, in himself interested in everything, of a bold and adventurous spirit, yet constitutionally quiet and reasonable. There was a great waste common, south of the village, and consisting largely of morass, which lent itself gloriously to the exploration of youth. This place was much infested by Egyptians, and teemed moreover

with small savage life in infinite profusion, being consequently irresistibly attractive to such as Brion and his playmates. Many were the adventures they experienced in this wild, in hunting and trapping, in extemporising rafts for the countless ponds, and thereon pushing to unknown shores, in penetrating thickets in search of animal surprises, and all in the delicious fear of kidnappings and lurking ambuscades. It was a good education for the spirit, fostering courage and self-reliance, and physically a wholesome counteraction to the Greek and Latin their minds absorbed. The cultured sportsman is ever the soundest product of civilization.

And then, all in a moment, and without a word of warning, the good life ended. It happened on a memorable evening in March, when one, who had been there once before, came a second time to visit the school.

He was a big man, with a heavy bloated face and dark restless eyes. He had been handsome in his time; but years of passion and self-indulgence had impaired the symmetry of features once comely in their strength. Some sickness of soul, moreover, would seem to have cowed an arrogance formidable enough in its day. His looks were furtive, his manner propitiatory, as he stood up before the pedagogue and stated his business. In fact, Mr Justice Bagott was a disgraced and fallen man. He had been disbenched for that obliquity which in a few decades time was to bring to the ground a far greater lawyer than he. In accepting a heavy bribe from a litigant he had dishonoured himself and disgraced his profession. And it had been no amelioration of the offence that the litigant in question was a

Papist. The scandal, which might well have cost the Justice his head, had been notorious enough to penetrate into the by-ways, along which it had even come to reach the ears of Brion's guardian himself. It had agitated that simple soul, even into some fatalistic premonition of what had actually come to pass. And now the blow had fallen: his charge was demanded of him.

He went out of the room to seek the child—the pleasant parlour, with its wainscotted walls and low timbered ceiling, which would always thenceforth be associated in Brion's mind with a dream of peace and security—and returned in a little, downcast and sorrowful, holding him by the hand. He had evidently, in that brief interval, broken the fatal news. The boy seemed dazed and stunned; but he lifted his head manfully to look the stranger in the face. He did not recall him: how could he, who had seen him but once before? yet he read enough there to recognise the finality of his sentence. And Bagott, for his part, perceived a girlish-faced youngster, slim and tall for his age, with fair hair and mouse-coloured eyebrows and lashes—personable material, but giving so far no indication of the sort of spirit which informed it. The boy was very pale, but whether by nature or through agitation he could not tell.

'Dost know me, child?' he said—not unkindly, though his voice was harsh.

Brion shook his head. 'No, Sir.'

'Troth,' said the visitor, 'eleven years may well wipe out deeper-graven memories than that. I am thy uncle, Quentin Bagott, child, who brought thee here, and am now to take thee hence. Wilt go with me?'

The boy had to bite his lip to restrain his tears; yet he kept them proudly back; and that the other noticed. For all at once he sighed, raising his head and bowing it; and when he spoke his voice was grievous.

'Brion,' said he; 'of all of ours, we are the only two left to one another.'

There spoke the broken soul, grasping in its fall at a child's hand where it would have flung away a man's. And, in some rare way, the lad understood. For he came forward, holding his head erect; and said he: 'I will go with you.'

Bagott took the young face between his palms, and gazed searchingly into the gray eyes.

'Ay,' said he—'ay, she's there——' and, looking over his head, 'a tall slip, minister,' says he, 'and as fair informed within, I trow, as his looks are telling. He credits you, i'faith.'

'Sir,' said the pedagogue, 'we claim to have done naught by him but after our nature and the terms of the bond, for which he hath repaid us, in his love and duty, a thousandfold. For the rest I have asked no questions and sought no knowledge—no, not even of your relationship, which appears to me now for the first time; no, not even of why, on that first evening, you demanded of my fear what my humanity would not have dreamed to deny you. Take him; he deserves the best; I can say no more—save that we shall miss him sorely. What day will it please you that he leaves us?'

'Here and now, thou most faithful steward,' said Bagott, reddening under that mild rebuke. 'And as to that my first policy, I took the short way, as I thought it, using the means to my hand at once to gag and bind

thee, lest thou shouldst prove refractory. Well, I say not but that suaver methods might have served, and meekness lessoned pride. Who makes a god of overbearing shall himself be overborne. Enough, I have horses without, and the occasion is pressing. For the boy's baggage, it can follow.'

Then, indeed, was shock and lamentation; but, for all his urbanity, the visitor was inexorable. So Brion must go to make his last adieux of the house and people that for thirteen years had sheltered and loved him, while his uncle and foster-father were at discussion to close the account embracing all that ministering tenderness. It is idle to dwell on the sad, fond scene, the more so as the spirit of youth is elastic, and easily extended to new interests, so that, even at the worst, there was a measure of consolation to be foreseen in the prospect of unknown adventuring. But presently they all came out into the road; and there in the blown evening was a man standing, and three horses held by him in a group; at sight of whom some spark of ancient memory glowed in the boy, and the name Clerivault sprang out of nowhere into his mind. It was indeed that very cavalier who had made his sword hiss from its scabbard like a snake on the day preceding that of the beautiful lady's appearance; and in an instant all that forgotten episode came back into Brion's mind, so that his heart leaped to this comfort of one whom, in his great forlornness, he might cling to as a friend.

Now the question rose of his knowledge to manage a horse; but he had learnt that lesson, and learnt it well, of friendly neighbours, and so was to be trusted. And in a moment he was astride, and, the others following, turned, even with some pride of place in him,

to cry his last farewells. Whereafter they all rode away, the boy's parting vision being of good Mrs Angell, her face puffed and blowzed with grief, the caul on her head awry, a napkin stuffed into her mouth, or taken out of it to wave, and the little Alse, all tearful, clinging to her skirts.

And so into the night and the unknown went Brion Middleton.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY WEST

THE speed of the little party was the speed of Brion, but they made what haste they could, for dusk was closing down, and the road none too free of dangers. At first Bagott would have the boy to ride with him, part for kindness' sake, and part to draw from him the particulars of his past life; but soon his questions lapsed into vagueness, and he sunk into a preoccupation which lost account of everything but its own dark melancholy. So Brion rode alone, Master Clerivault lacking any invitation to join him, and indulged his own unhappy fancies—which the cold wind and the gloomy road did nothing to assuage—to the limit of their bent. To be uprooted in a moment from that kindly soil, delivered to a relative of whose existence he had never even guessed hitherto, haled out into the night and the world, with an unknown future before him—it needed the utmost of his young resolution to bear up under such a battery of strokes. Sometimes, seizing him in gusts and spasms, his fate would seem to be monstrous, impossible, a nightmare from which he would waken in a little to hear Gregory breathing placidly in his bed by the window that overlooked the quiet garden; sometimes, realising the truth, he would be almost irresistibly moved to turn his horse's head, and gallop desperately back the way he had come. But he had a high spirit to conquer, and a reason effectively

to dismiss, such vain impulses. Yet, though he rode stiff, his chin up, his heart was full of misery and his soul of longing.

He was all at sea, too, as to the meaning of things. He had been wont to gather, from the attitude of his playmates, and from the little which, in his quiet observant way, he had managed to piece together, that he was an orphan and alone in the world—though why alone, and for what reason adopted, some instinct of pride in him forbade his inquiring. He had understood that his treatment was in a manner preferential, and may have childishly to himself debated the why and the wherefore; but since the facts, as his intelligence could not but comprehend, were designedly withheld from him, he would not seem to seek what it was not wanted to tell. Indeed, from hints let fall, he believed that his foster-parents knew really little more concerning him than he knew himself; and, in that, for whatever they might secretly surmise, he thought right; nor was the incident recorded as happening on a day of poignant memory allowed by them to affect their determination to close their minds to any conjecture or speculation whatever as to the possible truth. And so had Brion grown in content of ignorance, regarding his adoption as permanent, and never dreaming that there existed one on whose favour he continued, and to whom he owed duty and obedience as the solitary kinsman surviving to him, it seemed, in all the world. Out of the amazing dark had this figure risen, to claim and appropriate him—a great man, a Judge, as Mr Angell, though with some seeming reluctance and agitation, had whispered when he came to fetch him—and henceforth through this

apparition was he to approach so much nearer the mystery of his own being. Well, there was attraction in that, but not so absorbing for the moment as to assuage the anguish of this sudden severance from all to which he was attached by the living ligaments of custom and affection. He felt very lost and very lonely.

They got down to Lambeth after dark, joining by the road a party happily met and agreed to combine against footpads, and took the horse-ferry, close by the Palace gates, to cross the river into the Honour of Westminster. And thence they wended their way through a maze of narrow crowded streets, with dim lights hanging overhead like ships' lanterns suspended in shrouds, and presently, passing by the Abbey, and the walls and ruined towers of the old deserted Palace —vast cliffs of stone that loomed through the obscurity —turned into the yard of the *Cock* tavern and dismounted.

Now, so spent with cold and emotion was the boy that his brain was insensible to any impressions save those of his own weariness; wherefore he took but little notice of the novel matters about him, but only obeyed blindly when he was directed up a flight of stairs into a comfortable chamber, where a meal lay ready spread on a table, and a good sea-coal fire burned in the hearth. He ate and drank as he was told, asking no questions and being put none, while Master Clerivault, appearing after attending to the horses, waited on him and his uncle. There seemed a mystery and a silence about everything—the place, the hour, the company he was in—and those, combining with the warmth and animal comfort, so operated upon his senses that in the midst of the meal he fell fast asleep, and

thereafter remembered nothing more till he awoke to sunlight in a little room. He sat up in his bed, dazed for a moment, and then recollection rushed upon him in a flood, and he sank back again overwhelmed; when, lying so, with his eyes closed, presently he heard a footstep enter the room, and, without moving, raised his lids just so as to peer under them at the intruder. It was Master Clerivault, come in with a pile of clothes, which it seemed he had been brushing and folding, and these he proceeded to lay out ready, glancing in the act at the sleeper, as he thought him, and afterwards going soft-footed about the room, to open the casement and prepare the ewer for washing.

Now curiosity, ever the main tonic of youth, began to stir powerfully in the boy, stimulated, no doubt, by the fresh sunlight, and the unwonted sights and sounds about him; for with the opening of the window had risen a noise of cheery gossip and the stamping of horses from the yard below. So, widening his eyes, he took interested stock of this individual, who had so unexpectedly returned upon him out of the past. That past had been nine years ago, and without question the mental enlargement of the interval spoke in his new observation; for Master Clerivault did not seem to him at all what he had thought he remembered him to be. It was not that he looked older, for in fact he did not by a day; it was a question of the moral impression. The pale staring eyes appeared now a little mad; the grotesque weakness of the face, with its hanging underlip and its long nose dividing the sardonic moustache, was its definite feature; what had figured for martial in him suggested somehow the showy fustian of the stage. And yet, through all, his aspect

was likeable, and such as seemed to invite confidences without fear of a rebuff. Watching him a moment, Brion spoke :—

'Where am I, Master Clerivault?'

The intruder started, turned round, advanced with a mincing step, and leaning gracefully against the bed-post, one arm akimbo, answered in that queer rusty hinge voice of his :—

'In a room of the *Cock* tavern, Sir, in Westminster town.'

Brion looked about him. He lay in his shift in a comfortable bed, the appointments of the room were plain and clean, fresh rushes strewed the floor, and there was a great bunch of rosemary on the window-sill. Moreover, it was the morning of the day as of his own young life, and, pay what dole he would to sorrow, a sense of exhilaration would rise in him, to paint his fancy with bright anticipation. After all, a beard and a gruff voice came early to the stripling in Elizabeth's time, and, though they were not yet for him, he was near enough to manhood, as they read it, to hear, in his mind's ear, its distant shout to enterprise and glory. Suddenly he wanted to be up and afoot; but there was some curiosity to feed first.

'I remember not my passage hither,' he said.

'Sense and memory were out of thee,' replied the other, tapping his head twice. 'Might have fired a great culverin in thy ear, and not awakened thee. I carried thee—ha ! in these arms.'

'Master Clerivault,' said the boy, 'will it please you to tell me?'

'Anything,' was the answer, 'that my reason and my honour permits.'

'Who and what art thou, then?'

'Who but Harlequin Clerivault, please your Grace, some time gentleman of fortune, and since confidant and right-hand man to thine Uncle. He hangs on me, ha!'

'His confidant, say you? In what way of speaking, Master Clerivault?'

'In the law's way of speaking, Sir, which is to say that, being a Judge, he hath judged most excellently of a paragon.'

'Yourself, to wit?'

'Thou hast said it, not I.'

'What is it to be a paragon?'

'It is to be the best of one's kind, Sir, as a king most kingly, as a knight most knightly, as a retainer the most capable and to be trusted; to which mental graces those of the body should figure, as it were, in apposition, whereby a straight leg should express honesty, an arched brow love, or attachment, a chin slightly receding forbearance, and a fine shape signify proportion in all. Possessing the sum of which endowments, a man may call himself superlative, which is to be a paragon.'

His lids half closed; he pointed his moustache with an inimitable air. The corners of Brion's mouth flickered.

'I understand,' he said. 'And of all that my uncle was the judge? I think he must be a great Judge, Master Clerivault.'

'Great in judgment,' answered the paragon, 'but, alack, no longer a great Judge or a Judge at all.'

'Not a Judge?'

'We have resigned, Sir, our Commission. Let it rest at that. The question drops—in Law, *cadit quæstio.*'

Brion felt a momentary stupefaction; yet, after all, the news told him nothing where he knew nothing. After a brief consideration, he continued :—

'Why do we stay here, Master Clerivault? Has not my uncle a house?'

The man coughed before answering :—

'Ay, and to which we are wending.'

'In London?'

'Not so; but westwards in Devon—where his family was used to dwell. 'Tis called the Moated Grange.'

The boy sat with wide eyes. This was strange and bewildering enough, to be sure, and not less so for the obvious reserve with which it was all said. He thought again a little, then spoke out candidly :—

'I see I can expect little satisfaction for my questions. Yet I am not very happy, Master Clerivault, and I think you might know it.'

The poor fellow looked at him kindly; there was the suggestion of a moist blink in his eyes.

'Nay,' he said : 'all is well for thee; there is no need for unhappiness, but caution is the keynote of the legal mind. *Mutiana cautio.* What I may answer thee I will answer. Ask, in God's name.'

'Well,' said Brion, 'I would fain know why my uncle, after this long abandoning of me to ignorance of his very existence, hath come at this late hour to claim me for his own?'

'Ha!' cried the other: 'I can satisfy thee there. It is sentiment, Sir—pure sentiment; the desire of a man made lonely, and something occupationless, to fasten to the only tie of kinship left remaining to him.'

The boy did not speak again for a while. There was something moving in his heart, some wonderful

new sense of a warmth and meaning underlying the chill enigma of these happenings. That to *him*, for some mystic reason, this great overshadowing figure, with its dark preoccupations, could be looking for solace and affection, seemed pathetically incredible; yet the paragon spoke like one who knew, and he could not misdoubt him. I think from that moment all dread of his strange kinsman left him, and was supplanted by a shy confidence in his own tender ability to play the part desired of him. They were alone in the world, it appeared—just they two. The thought clung suddenly to him, as his arms already in spirit clung about the desolate man. Presently he sighed, and looked up.

'What is to be done with me?' said he. 'May you tell me that?'

'What duty and fondness may conspire,' answered Clerivault, 'and love repay. Learning thou hast, and swordmanship shalt have, to beat the brains of the world with a double edge. It is a fine place, the world, in these days, Sir. There is a greatness come into it for anyone to seize that hath the spirit and the courage. Dismiss what is lost with a snap of the fingers. What is office but confinement—to live in a Court when one might possess infinity. The horizons of the dawn arch upwards, revealing new prospects: there is a wind blows in under them, freighted with strange messages from gods and peoples never known before. The matrix of this sweet motherland of ours heaves with birth imminent: that great Triton of the sea that wed with her prepares a glory for his sons. There shall be wings —ha! to sweep the stars withal, or white as swans upon the waters, skimming down the moonlit levels. Enlargement is in the air, and our English lungs expand

to it. Shall we not adventure with the rest, you and I? Here's but a necessary interval, till we come, like mewing hawks, to burst our bars and rise to heaven.'

His wild eyes gleamed exultant; his voice squeaked and cracked; he flung one hand aloft, as if to point the upward way. And Brion sat regarding him, a little amazed, but still more curious. Presently he said:—

'*Are* you English, Master Clerivault? I had not thought it.'

The effect of that simple question startled him. Harlequin skipped as if a whip had lashed him. His eyebrows rose, his teeth set, incoherent maledictions came reverberating over his palate down his nose. It was moments before he could master his emotion.

'Why?' said he. There was actually moisture on his forehead.

'I know not,' said Brion, somewhat alarmed. 'It was thy name, perhaps. What ails thee at my question? If there was hurt in it, my ignorance, not my will, was to blame.'

'Fool, fool!' muttered Clerivault, slapping his brow. 'To quarrel with the lamb because it bleats!' He passed a trembling hand across his mouth; his features stiffened into a mirthless smile. 'God assoil thee,' he said: 'but never ask me so again. *I* not English! Then England exists not save for curs and hybrids. Will it please you to rise, Sir?'

His voice sunk from high protest to the civility of a servitor; and indeed Brion knew not what he was nor how to treat him, his office seemed so menial yet his soul so great. He tumbled out of bed, however, and washed himself in cold water, with a ha'pennyworth of mottled soap, and, while dressing, peeped often and

curiously from the window into the yard of the inn, where were ostlers rubbing down horses, and maids flitting—clean girls with unconfined necks as white as their aprons, and skirts close to their hips, which Brion thought ever so much prettier than the full kirtles worn by the quality—and here and there a blowzy carter staring owlishly over a mug of beer. When he was ready, his attendant conducted him to a little timbered room on the floor below, where he found Mr Bagott seated over a round of cold beef and a stoup of ale on which he was breakfasting. He nodded to the boy, and bade him be seated and fall to, for he had a long journey before him.

So Brion obeyed, conscious that the dark gloomy eyes were appraising him from under their heavy brows, yet feeling in some way secure and not put out of countenance. And presently, Clerivault being out of the room, his uncle spoke in a quick sudden manner :—

'Hast slept sound, boy?'

'Yes, Sir,' he answered, looking the other straight and frank in the face.

'And favoured thine attendant?'

'He is strange, Sir; but I favoured him.'

'Ay, and questioned him, moreover?'

'I have asked him many questions.'

'Instance?'

'Why, who and what he was himself for one.'

'And his answer?'

'That he was thy confidant and right-hand man—in his sort a paragon; which was to say the best of his kind.'

A smile, like a tiny spasm, twitched the moody features.

'Well, there's no degree in him like best, since he's himself alone. What next?'

'He said you were no more a Judge, and I asked him why, and he answered you had resigned your Commission.'

He saw the eyes, as he spoke, blaze into an instant fire.

'He said!' cried Bagott. 'A prating magpie, lacking tact and sense! No more a Judge, quotha? I'll bridle him, by God!' He fumed and rocked, muttering incoherences. 'What further?' he said presently.

The boy faced the question steadily.

'Only that you would love me,' said he, 'if I would love you—as I will.'

The other put his knife from him, leaning back in his chair. A wonderful new softness had come to his face.

'Thou wilt?' said he. 'Then that's a bargain with us. Shall we be done henceforth with subterfuge? I like thy trusty eyes. They are thy—heart, but we'll be friends! What if I am no longer Judge? You'll love me none the less?'

'No, Sir.'

'That's sweet and well. What other question put and answered? Whither we go?'

'He told me 'twas to a house, the Moated Grange, where you was used to dwell in Devon.'

'A fair country, Brion, where we may live in peace and comfort, forgetting all the plots and hateful toils that stretch to snare men's feet in these cursed warrens of the town. Harlequin is to take you.'

'Harlequin?'

'And I'll follow betimes.'

'Uncle?'

'Well, boy?'

'Is not Master Clerivault mad?'

'How, mad?' The black eyes conned him whimsically.

'I know not,' answered Brion. 'His speech is so strange; and when I misdoubted his English blood, he skipped and sweat with fury.'

Bagott nodded, smiling.

'He did? He would, child: 'tis to touch him on the quick. Whatever hybrid he, call him but out of his imagined birthright, and you put a match to tow. England is not only all the world, but all the stars and all the heavens to him. But, mad?'—the humour left his face; his brows bent down—'If madness is in devotion, then is he mad; if madness is in incorruptible fidelity, then is he mad. And so, perchance, would Reason call him, but not I his master, who saved him from the gallows.'

Brion's eyes and red lips opened together.

'O, how?' he said. 'Poor Clerivault.'

'Poor Clerivault!' echoed the other. 'A mad fool, maybe, for that he held chivalry before self-interest. He was implicated in Ket's rising against the gentry in '49, and brought up at Norwich assizes to stand his trial. He would have been hanged, a mere tool of others, but that I won him off; and since he hath given me the devotion of a dog. Twenty years ago,'—his voice fell to rapt and wondering, as if he had forgotten his audience —'through bright fortune and sour, and he hath never swerved from his allegiance. He hath learnt law; he is my liegeman, clerk and bodyguard in one. One third coxcomb, one gentleman, and one most rare poet

and romantic—he dreams, and so lives in his dreams that he half believes them true. Vain as a peacock, simple as a child, sapient in vision—you must like poor Harlequin.'

'I like him very well, Sir' said Brion—'if I but knew how to bear myself towards him. "One time gentleman of fortune," quotha—'twas so he called himself.'

'God knows what he was!' exclaimed Bagott. 'His conceit will make him twenty titles in a day, and not one to be believed. Only through all there's the sound core to him, like the good white heart in a flaunting cabbage. He had a monkish schooling, that I know; and thereby came his fall; for to the houseless friars who fomented that rebellion he ought his foolish part in it. Well, he's a fool i'faith.'

His eyes suddenly fixed his nephew's in an unmoving stare; then he rose from his seat, walked to the door, came back, and bade the boy, with a commanding gesture, to stand up before him, when he regarded the young face hardly.

'What,' said he in a deep low voice, 'hath surprised me into this confidence with a child? Small talk forsooth; yet, mark well, what I trust to thy ear, howsoever little, keep in trust.'

He lifted the soft chin with his forefinger, and searched the fearless eyes that did not flinch before his.

'On my faith, Uncle,' said Brion.

He answered, 'That is well,' and, waiting so a few moments, 'Remain here till Harlequin comes; then follow his directions,' he said, and turned, and left the room.

Brion would have liked to ask more questions, hinting at the mystery of his own past; but he might not dare,

with those fierce looks probing him. Still, the sense of his being already in a measure privileged gave him confidence, and he felt as cheerful as this sudden transplanting of all his customs and affections to a new soil would let him be, so that he awaited Master Clerivault's reappearance even with impatience.

The paragon returned in no long time, booted and cloaked for the journey, and bringing the stirring information that they were to set out within the hour from the inn yard, whence Mr Baggott had arranged for them to join in with a company of traders and bagmen, all well mounted and armed, which was to proceed by reasonable stages into the West country, and was already gathering for its start. So down they went, the boy being warmly clad against the cold, and found their horses ready waiting with the saddle-bags on them, and a good party assembled, most of them at their stirrup-cups, and all preparing, inside and out, for a quick departure.

It was a wonderful time, so full of novelty and excitement for Brion that there was no room in him for brooding or apprehension; but, when they rode forth, his eyes were for twenty things at once, and least for his own company, who were in truth as safe and sober-sided a set of gravities as ever combined to make a prose of venturing. For which reason Brion soon forgot them for the livelier interests about him. He observed much, putting few questions to his companion—for that was not his way, except he had a definite purpose in asking—but measuring and marking in silence. The great buildings took him with wonder—and most, naturally, the congregated cluster of the Abbey, with its fair eastern chapel only then recently finished, and

Margaret's church, and the half-ruined royal palace and hall, approached through a gateway with octagonal towers which led into a mighty quadrangle with the river shining beyond. But more he liked to note the people, and the tumult and the multiformity of the crowds through which he passed. The jolly sellers at their booths (each hung over with its insignia, like the Cathedral stall of a knight-banneret), and their eternal chaunt of "What d'ye lack"; the ballad singers bawling their wares, and the loaded oyster-wenches dragging theirs; the gingerbread wife, the fiddler at a street corner—no commonplace of them all but figured as a very *lusus naturae* to these young emancipated eyes. Once and again a knight in armour, with his scarf at his shoulder and a plume in his velvet cap, would come riding over the cobbles, scattering the crowd right and left; and that to Brion was the finest sight of all. But there was a funnier, which made him presently stare, and then go off into a fit of giggling which he tried vainly to repress. For suddenly he saw coming towards them the oddest figure of a woman he had ever seen. She was old and pinched and raddled, with a great ruff round her neck, and a high-crowned hat set askew on a wig as red as rhubarb. Her stomacher stuck a foot below her waist, supporting an oval frame, over which was draped a padded farthingale like a great swinging bell that ended at her ankles; and thence projected a pair of gilt and painted shanks, which were like nothing in the world so much as a couple of enormous marrow-bones. It was only on her near approach that Brion perceived these to be a sort of fantastic clogs, half a yard in height, which she wore to the soles of her embroidered slippers, over which they were

strapped; but so little gravity did they afford to the poor body that she needed the prop of a walking cane on the one side, and on the other of a sweet ape of fashion in a French doublet, who was her cicisbeo, to hold her up; in despite of which buttresses, she had a hard ado to keep her equilibrium as she passed, smirking and ogling.

'Ay,' said Clerivault, with an answering smile, hearing the boy unable to suppress his merriment. 'Only laugh small, if thou must laugh. When oldest age mates with youngest fashion, she rightly bears derision for her pains. Yet, for the fashion itself, it finds favour in exalted quarters.'

'What,' said Brion: 'those painted clogs?'

'Not clogs, my young master, but chopines so called —a fashion brought from Venice. You will see them once and again and mark their indication. She was a small lady, that, yet a great lady.'

'How, great, do you mean?'

'Why, by the altitude of her chopine, Sir, which was as much higher than a patten as her ladyship was above a fishwife. The measure of that folly is the measure of its wearer's rank.'

'And does the Queen wear them?'

'God forbid! She would have to go on stilts by the token. But when I spoke of fashion, I meant these new-found farthingales, which, by'r lady, are the very nadir of inelegance. Well, there is virtue in them, they say; and what are we to carp at virtue, though in a fantastic form. Let our maids go ugly, so they go chaste.'

Brion was puzzled, but he said no more; and other distractions quickly engaged him. They were soon out

of Westminster, going by the north bank of the river, and, making in a little the village of Chelsea—dear to bathers for its clear water and pleasant meadows—rode through it and in no long while after reached the ferry at Putney, where, at the cost of a halfpenny a head, they crossed the river into the Manor of Wimbledon, seeing some men net and haul in a brace of great salmon by the way. For the river here yielded not only that excellent fish, but eke much smelt, and an occasional sturgeon or porpoise, for which reason its waters were exceedingly prized by anglers. Thence, going over an extended heath in close order, they reached the royal town of Kingston, where, passing by the church—whose great paschal candle, once kept perpetually burning through the halfpennies of the faithful, the Reformation had at last extinguished—Brion saw the very stone on which the Anglo-Saxon Kings were wont to sit to receive their crowns, and was properly impressed though not excited thereby. And here, at the *Castle* inn, they dined on calvered salmon and a huge baron of beef, with ale and sack to wash them down, after which the young gentleman rode so sleepily in his saddle that for miles he offered but a glazed eye to his surroundings, and only looked forward to bed and the journey's end.

They lay that night at Farnborough, whence they were to journey by way of Salisbury and Dorchester to Bridport, and there take boat for the Devon coast, crossing Lyme Bay to a little fishing village named Torquay, which was the point nearest to their destination on the moors. And all that they did, nor am I going to recount the details of the journey, which was sufficiently tedious and without event. But here one

of their party would leave them, and there another, making for the big towns, until from Dorchester they two issued alone, and were so together till the end was reached. The weather all this time was fine but cold, and Brion took his destiny manfully, though sometimes his heart would fail him a little over the weariness of it all. But whatever he might think or feel, there was the paragon always at hand to hearten and entertain him, to paint the future in roseate colours or improve the present with tales of his own past prowess and extraordinary experiences.

So at the end of four days they came into Devon, and found themselves towards a still bright evening riding into the little town of Ashburton, some three miles north of which lay the Moated Grange.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

At the *Golden Lion* by the bull-ring the two halted to drink a sack-posset, for the boy was very spent and weary. Good fifteen miles had they ridden that last day, with three yet to cover to reach their journey's end; yet his fatigue was as much of the mind as the body. The spirit which had sustained him throughout this long wayfaring seemed now, in the near achievement of its objective, to falter and lose heart. He realised all at once, as he had never yet done, his abysmal severance from the old familiar life. The thought came upon him with a force which certainly owed nothing to the dreariness or inhospitability of the country he was in, for it was a fair and friendly country, but to the felt unattainableness of his own. He was like a sleep-walker, who wakes to find himself naked and alone in spaces of impenetrable darkness, with his bed become a vague remoteness, a warm refuge impossible for his distraught mind ever again to locate or recover.

This reaction from a more expectant, or a more stoic, mood was due to many things—physical exhaustion, that sentiment of isolation, more than all, perhaps, to a doubt which had been slowly forming in his mind as to the reality of the prospect he had pictured for himself. That doubt had not until latterly come to haunt and disturb him; there had been no room for it to germinate in the fullness and novelty of the

preceding days. He had found the greater world, on this his first excursion into it, wonderful enough, but wonderful more by reason of its spiritual renaissance than its material features. He did not, of course, put it in that way, or realise that the spirit abroad was in any sense other than the spirit he might have expected to encounter. But in fact it was different, and he himself was unconsciously infected by it. There was something stirring throughout the land which had not been there before, a mental enlargement, a broadening view, a sense of the wider aspects of nationality. It was like the wind that comes with the turn of the ebb tide, the waking breath of a dreamer who has been far and seen strange things, the burden of a rumour that the world was vaster than men had supposed, and that men were freer than they had supposed to explore it. Expansion was in the air, a throb of drums and ring of enterprise, a vision as of a new dawn breaking over the still smoking ruins of feudalism and intolerance. And of this sense of shining spaciousness, having England for its vivid nucleus, was somehow the prevalent atmosphere, into which Brion had entered to feel without knowing it its buoyancy and inspiration. He had ridden in it day by day; it had exalted his young spirit, and painted for him in befitting colours the goal for which they made. That he had always pictured to himself as something stately and important, meet dwelling for the dignified leisure of one who had been great but had done with greatness, a family seat in the ample sense. In vision, even, he had seen it as a mystic castle on a hill, with himself, a knight in silvery armour, riding up to its portcullis.

And now, with their near approach to their destination, had crept in this doubt, this depression, which was like a premonition of disillusionment. Was it, indeed, all to be as he had fancied, or something very notably and very sombrely different? He had questioned Clerivault as to the house and its life and surroundings, and it only now occurred to him for the first time that the answers he had received had been habitually reserved and evasive, general rather than specific. Had there been an intention to hide some ugly truth from him, or was it merely a lack of the descriptive faculty in his companion which gave his statements such an air of foreboding? Something, moreover, in the country itself seemed to deepen his impression of loneliness and melancholy. It was not that it was not beautiful, but that as they rode on they appeared to recede more and more from the signs of human occupation, and to penetrate ever deeper into the grip of a great solitariness. There was a sense of wild desolate spaces at hand, of inhospitable emptinesses, unpeopled and unexplored. The stretched resilience of his mind, like a released catapult, flew back to the extreme of laxity; and he feared the worst.

The fact and the comfort of the little town reassured him somewhat. Here was an oasis in the desert, and but three miles after all from the Grange. There might, too, be other dwellings between. Then the good drink warmed the cockles of his heart, and gave him renewed vigour and courage. But he was allowed no more than time to consume it, for evening was closing in, and his escort was nervous for the road. There was some curiosity about them, news of their coming having got abroad; but Clerivault refused to be drawn by the

landlord or any other, and in a few minutes they were on their way again.

They rode out due north, following up the course of the little river Ashburn, which here was used to turn the wheels of a colony of fulling-mills; and presently came out into rising country, very wild and open. Nor was there any further sign of human habitation; but only a great still sky, and a waste of rolling land heaved under it. The sense of desolation increased; there was a call of strange birds from the shadows; no spark of light or welcome greeted them from ahead; but always the stark track went under, growing fainter and fainter. Presently Brion, with a little quiver in his voice, put a question :—

'Are we near arrived, Clerivault?'

'In a little,' was the short answer.

The boy was silent for a while; then opened desperately on the subject in his mind :—

'It must stand very lonely.'

The other cleared his throat.

'Solitude, says the proverb, is often the best company.'

Brion felt a little shiver go over him.

'Methinks I prefer the company to the proverb. Is solitude to be our only one?'

'Nay; but the best.'

'And what for the second-best?'

'There will be your Uncle, when he comes.'

'And till he comes?'

'There's Clerivault.'

'No more?'

'Cry you mercy, Sir! I'm what God made me. If I could be a host in myself, I would be it to please you.'

The boy was too worn and mind-weary to seek for

words to mend his meaning; but others broke from him in an impulse of despair :—

'I think I shall fall and die if the end is not soon.'

The cry went to the good fellow's heart. He brought his horse close alongside, and put out a reassuring hand.

'Nay,' said he, 'nay. Keep a brave spirit, sweetheart. 'Tis but a short effort, and the goal is won. There have been others gone before to prepare for us —Phineas cook, and young William scullion, not to speak of great Nol the porter, who follows presently with his Honour, and Gammer Harlock which hath rooted in the house so long that, like the mandrake, she would shriek to be torn from it. God so! but we will have gay company, with lights to greet us, and warmth and rich fare.'

He stooped to the boy's bridle as he spoke, and, fetching away from the little stream, whose course they had followed till now, swerved a point or two to the north-east. Brion stiffened his neck, and sought with his weary eyes to penetrate the gathered glooms, which as yet yielded no sign of cheer or welcome. Only, at some indefinite point ahead, they seemed to heap themselves into a blur of blackness, like a stain of ink on wet gray blotting paper. The track beneath them was hardly now to be distinguished; the irregular ground called for wary riding, and their progress was slow. He looked up and thought he saw a star falling in the sky; but it was a light crossing his brain. Then he seemed to reel, and clutching at the saddle bow, 'Clerivault!' he cried.

A cheery shout answered him: 'The Moated Grange —ha!' and in the same moment his rein was caught by his companion, and they stopped. He might

scarcely give a sigh of joy, though discerning with his dim eyes only shadow and confusion, when the other leapt to the ground, and he heard the furious battering of his sword-hilt on echoing wood. Then after an interval came a great flare of light, and a sense of figures gesticulating in a swirl of red smoke, and of voices in deep altercation. Whereafter he remembered nothing more, but only a sigh of yielding and collapse, followed by a stillness which at first seemed the rest of heaven, until things began to move in it, and faces to appear, and inarticulate voices to babble and rage. He wearied to escape them, to get deep down underground where he would find peace and utter silence; but they came between, and forced him to stay and listen. Then suddenly he was raised, for all that he felt himself turned to a stone figure, heavy and enormous, with nothing alive in him but his brain, and a gush of molten fire went down his throat, setting him all ablaze. Sparks poured from his eyes; he could hear his whole being crackling within like a burning gorse-bush—faster and faster, while he whirled about in a mad frenzy. At the height, a flood of warm water was flung, which extinguished the flames in a moment, and, released and blissful, he sank away into an oblivion as sweet as death.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE BY THE MOOR

WITH a snore like the grinding on shingle of a boat's nose which has been run ashore at the end of a long smooth journey, Brion opened his eyes from a period of the profoundest repose he had ever enjoyed in his life. All the fever and the weariness were gone from him, though a strange sense of lightness and giddiness had succeeded, so that he lay blinking and yawning, incurious about his situation, and contentedly waiting for it to develop itself as it listed.

There is a self-healing balm in the 'liquid dew of youth' whose essence is a short memory, for when an evil is forgotten it is over. Yesterday's fret and exhaustion were no more to the boy now than the bed on which his body rested—a pretext to luxuriate; and he remained as he was until the balance between pleasure and curiosity insensibly inclining the latter's way spoiled the blissful equilibrium, when he sat up, all at once actively interested in his surroundings.

The room in which he found himself was small and, as he assumed, high up, for the low broad casement commanded from his position an unbroken oblong of grey cloud. Its walls were panelled in dark oak, and the ceiling was beautifully groined, with the cusps picked out in gold leaf. Bed, press and the two chairs were all of the same rich wood, carved and elaborated, and over the head of the first was a tester, with hangings

of purple damask having a gold border. A prince could not have asked for more; and, if the rest of the house were in keeping, he had reason enough to congratulate himself at least on the quality of his exile. He slid to the floor, and ran to look from the window.

His room was an eyrie, sure enough, and commanding a wild bird's view. He saw beneath him a space of bewildered land, bounded by dense low trees, and thence and thereover, as far as his sight could reach, fold upon fold of heathery country, like a great ground-swell breaking on the horizon in a line of light, or revealing, as waves reveal in their troughs, deep mysteries of sunken forests, and streaming rocks, and clusters of upstanding birches that might have been the masts of foundered ships. Once, twice, above the swell rose a mightier crest crowned with stone, and a level cold sky roofed all. But, though wide and liberal, it was desolate—no chimney or rising smoke to be seen above the green anywhere.

Brion opened the casement, and looked down. The click of the latch caught the attention of a man standing on a sward below, and their eyes met.

'Clerivault!' cried the boy.

The paragon clapped his hands, exultant.

'Wait,' he cried, 'while I come to you—'and disappeared into the house.

Brion hung out. He could make little of his position, save that it was somewhere aloft in a medley of building, of which a projecting gable cut off all but a narrow section. But to his right, where the house ended, stretched a wide garden, less reassuring in its aspect than the room in which he stood. For it was very tangled and overgrown, and so run to a waste of weed that its flower and vegetable parts could no

longer be distinguished from one another; but all rioted in a dank disorder, made more melancholy by the gloom of encircling trees, which for ages, it seemed, had not been topped or pruned.

As he gazed, feeling a doubt creep over him, he heard a step climbing the wooden stairs, and turned to greet his good comrade.

Clerivault's eyes shone bright as he entered the room.

'Ha!' said he: 'all's well if thou art well.'

'Well, but something giddy,' said Brion.

''Tis food thou needest,' said the other, taking him by the shoulders and looking fondly in his face. ''Slid, but you frightened us, with your tossing and babbling, There was witch Harlock would ha' set a poultice of black hellebore to thy midriff, to draw out the devil in possession; but I would have none of it, and she cursed me for a fool. "A must sweat or die," quoth she: and, "My life for his," I answered. It was thy brain sought rest, poor wight; and what for that like good burnt sack, mulled hot? And so we gave you, Phineas and I, and saw the blessed dew come forth, even as you raved, and all thereafter peace. God's 'slid! but I was thankful. And did I overtax my trust, sweetheart? Go to! you missed a rare supper. That Phineas knows his part. But I could eat none of it till my heart was eased.' His hands moved on the young shoulders; he withdrew one of them to pass its back across his wild eyes. 'Come,' he continued, in a husky voice: 'the morn is well advanced, and the board waits. There be arrears, ha! to make up. Despatch, despatch!'

'He loves me,' thought Brion. 'Poor Clerivault!'

A true tenderness was growing in his heart for this strange creature. It was a comfort to think of their reciprocal attachment, binding them comrades, in whatever trials might be in store for him. He dressed quickly, eager, now the fact was achieved, to make the acquaintance of the house. He would ask no questions, trusting better the witness of his eyes, and came out of his room prepared for anything.

His general impression of what he saw, then and thereafter, may be described as a mournful rather than a dejected one. It was of a queer rambling place, tossed together without much system or coherence, as if each succeeding owner had brought his own section with him to tack on to the rest. The stairs and passages were labyrinthine; the rooms for the most part mean though including a fine dining hall and ample kitchens. Indeed the offices seemed disproportionately capacious, as pointing to an original design on a larger scale. And as was this structural incongruity, so was it with the furniture. The kitchens were nobly provided; the living rooms for the greater part empty and forlorn. The fire in the former burned in a huge range, the draught from which turned a windmill which turned the spit; in the latter was no accommodation for warmth whatever, save what braziers might afford. Only in the great hall was a hearth, meet to its capacities; and only there, and in one or two of the rooms, including his own bedchamber, did Brion discover any signs of suggested occupation, such as chairs, tables, cabinets and the like; and, in the hall, some hangings of tapestry. The whole feeling the place gave him was one of quiet sadness, of a wild and rather sweet desolation; and this from the position and aspect of the

house, when he came to be familiar with them, no less than from the loneliness of its deserted chambers.

This Moated Grange was situated some three miles N. by E. of Ashburton, in the midst of a lonely pasture, whose western limit touched the moor. There was no house nearer than the last house of the town. It stood on a tiny tributary of the Ashburn, which supplied the moat surrounding it with water; but both sluice and ditch, long years neglected, were choked with moss and growth, and the water slept stagnant, black between its islands of duckweed, and overshadowed throughout its whole compass by a rank luxuriance of bush and tree, whose lower branches dipped in liquid slime. From the inner circle of this moat—provision in long past days against the depredations of wolves—the ground rose somewhat to the wall, scarce seen for foliage, which ringed the whole estate; and here and there in its circumference great masses of ilex had gathered and flourished, building a darkness against the sky. Only in one spot was the fence of thicket broken, and that was where the bridle track, branching from the main road, crossed the moat by a stone bridge of a single span, and green with lichen, to the great entrance gate of the court. This gate was set in a tall rectangular turret of three sections, the uppermost plain, with a good window, the middle ornamented with crosses and lozenges in timber, its window square and small, the lowest containing the door, strong oak in a massive frame and studded with iron nuts. A low peaked roof, crested with a weathercock, surmounted this tower, which was moreover supported on its right by a building in which were the stables, and on its left by a shallow lean to, which served both as a buttress and

for the porter's lodge. Thence on both sides ran the containing wall of the property, whose whole aspect, in truth, suggested melancholy and decay. Between the outer gate and the house itself—the latter a heterogeneous congeries of parts, gabled and timbered—there was no stone in the narrow court but was green with moss, no broken shard which had fallen from a roof but had dulled its sharp edges against a generation of rain. Grass grew in the crannies of the walls, in the stone mullions of the windows, in the joints of the semi-circular steps before the main door. A strange still place, very remote in its sorrowful isolation from the picture the boy's fancy had painted; yet, to the explorative soul of youth, not altogether without its uneasy charm.

Brion, wondering a good deal, after his first curious inspection of the home which was henceforth to be his for good fortune or ill, put a wistful question or two to Clerivault, who had been playing the silent cicerone to his charge, furtively watchful the while of the impression things made on him:—

'Is it to be just you, and me, and Phineas, and William, and old Harlock and Uncle Quentin—only us, always, living alone here together?'

'And Nol porter,' cried Clerivault cheerily: 'Art forgetting him—the jolliest he of us all, and thrice the man in bulk of any other.'

The boy was silent awhile. Perhaps he was thinking of kind Mrs Angell, and of Alse, and of what sort of substitute the old witch woman would make for those gentle ministrants.

'Yes,' he said presently, 'I shall like to see Nol porter,' and was quiet again, turning over something in his mind.

'Clerivault,' he said then, 'was what is in the house, my—my bed, I mean, and the rest of the things, here before we and the others came?'

'Narry one, Sir,' was the answer. 'The place was as naked as my hand. What thou seest was sent down from his Honour's house in London. Think not but there'll be more despatched anon. We'll have a cosy nest before we're finished.'

It came to be as he said, indeed, a great cargo of furniture, including many pictures and a quantity of valuable plate and knicknacks, arriving presently by convoy; yet there was never enough, all told, to make more than a scanty show about the house, and to the last the majority of the rooms remained as when Brion first saw them, vacant of everything but dust and spiders.

'What makes you to ask?' questioned Clerivault, a little curiously.

'I was thinking,' said Brion, 'of him that lived here before us.'

The man's countenance fell.

'Who told you of him?'

'It was Gammer Harlock.'

'A murrain on her withered tongue!' exclaimed the other irritably. 'Lived, lived! Why, what is a house but to live in!'

'She told me his name,' said Brion. 'It was Matthew Fulk, and he was a sad miser. He has been dead a year and more now; but all during the latter half of his dwelling here she lived with him alone as his servant —only she and none other. This house had been his for twenty years, maybe; and in the first of that time there was a young maid, his niece, that abode with

him. But her he murdered, and cast her body down the well in the well-house, and gave out that she had gone off with one of the rebel troopers that marched to the siege of Exeter in the time of the great riots.'

'And why should she not have?' The pupils of Clerivault's eyes stared like a cat's.

'Because,' said Brion, 'after his death they would cleanse the well of its foulness, seeing the water had rotted there undrawn since the maid was lost; and in its slime were found bones—human bones, Clerivault.'

'More liker some dog's or sheep's,' said the other scornfully. 'Why should he murder her?'

'Because the devil whom he served asked a sacrifice of him.'

Clerivault snorted.

'Ah, hold your peace! This is the very lunacy of superstition. I knew the man, Sir—was here with him on legal business four, or it may be five years ago, and plumbed his very soul. A gripping, sour-lidded curmudgeon: but murder! He feared the law too much. These be old wives' tales, and she who utters them a potion-brewing witch. Give her no credit, I entreat you.'

Brion did not answer, pursuing his own train of thought.

'Clerivault,' said he in a little, 'it must be long since my Uncle dwelt here.'

'How?' asked the other.

'Why, if this Fulk was twenty years a tenant?'

'Was he? Well, we'll not quarrel to a hair. But 'tis long as thou sayest—since he was a boy, in truth.'

'A boy!' Brion actually laughed. It seemed so impossible that that tremendous being could ever have been a boy—like himself.

'The Bagotts,' went on Clerivault, 'were big people here in the past, portreeves, and lords of the Stannary Court in Ashburton. They owned mines, and prospered. But, on one cause or another, they were for ever at litigation, and in the end that cracked them. The law was in their blood, i'faith, and imposthumated, as it were, in thine Uncle—came to a great head, and burst, imperilling his life. It was time for him to withdraw from it.'

'Was his life imperilled?'

'Say his reason, at least.'

'Had he never brothers or sisters, Clerivault?'

The man glanced quickly at the boy before answering.

'One sister,' said he, in a restrained voice; 'but she died. Art his sole kin in all the world, young master. Be thankful for it. Love him and he'll repay thy love. To those he trusts he's ever gentle and considerate, fierce and proud though he profess in the world's eye. Do we not know him—Phineas a master cook, and the boy William, and honest Nol and myself? Else should we, brilliant children of our parts, have been content to follow him into this exile, to sink our gifts in solitude, to serve him in sour misfortune as in prosperity? He has the trick of attachment, like some men with animals.'

'What misfortune?' asked the boy wonderingly.

Clerivault bit his lip.

'Did I not tell thee?' said he. 'The law, taken in excess, like wine affects the reason, and he was too full of it for health—it impaired his judgments. Wherefore his decision to resign, and to seek amid these scenes of peace the restoration of his faculties. Misfortune enough—ha ! to be reduced, in plenitude of one's power, to a sick nonentity.'

Brion, though marvelling a little that it should have been deemed necessary to hide so simple an explanation from him, was satisfied with it now it had come. He understood at last the meaning of their withdrawal into these country seclusions, and was both sorry and proud for this great-souled relative of his, who had so nobly resolved to put conscience before self-interest.

The two walked on a little; and then said Clerivault, breaking a silence between them: 'This place consorts not with your dreams, mayhap, of what was to be; yet shall you come to be as happy as the day in it. We are few, but the moor is big. It is a wild free life thou shalt lead, and content and lustihood shalt thou draw from it. Now mount with me, I prithee, to thy chamber once again, and I will show thee things.'

So they went up together, and there found Gammer Harlock busy bed-making. She was an old woman, bent and bony, but with an amazing vigour in her attenuated frame. Her face was of the hatchet shape, with an aquiline nose and slow projecting eyes, and the compressed austerity of her mouth so drooped at the corners as to make her chin appear a separate attachment, moving on a pivot as in a mask. But she was scrupulously neat, no rent in her cloth of frieze gown, no stain on her close linen coif or the partlet about her withered neck. She showed no knowledge of their presence, but went on with her work.

Clerivault sniffed and scowled.

'Better employed in making his bed, Gammer,' said he, 'than in poisoning his mind.'

'Eh, jackanapes!' she answered; 'are ye there, and talking?'

She did not turn her head. Her voice was like a low whine, harsh yet thin.

'Talk and hang,' said he, 'you old devil. Will you tell me this: Why, if Fulk committed murder and you knew it, you shouldn't be broke for an accessory after the fact?'

Her eyes turned on him like a crab's.

'Because he was dead when I knew it, ye fine lawyer.'

'And being dead,' said Clerivault, 'you think it safe to asperse his character, which is slander and defamation. Art on the horns of a dilemma, old witch.'

She made a sound of thin derision.

'Call his character to witness, and call again. Ye'll get no answer, for he had none.' She turned on him with some repressed fury. 'Attend you to your business and leave me to mine. Nine year come Pentecost have I lived and served in this house; doing by it what was never asked in the bond; sweeping and garnishing throughout, though Fulk he lived in no more than two of its rooms; and all for a scant pittance and less meat. Do I know its every rat and shadow, think you, ay and its ghosts that walk and its voices that whisper, to be told by a niddipol lawyer's clerk, that hath scarce set foot in these silences, what to make of them but scorn and mockery. There are eyes for those that can see and ears for those that can hear: but it is aye the fool that misdoubts others, and the wise man himself.'

'Misdoubts what?' said Clerivault. 'These maggots of a flyblown brain? Well, God quit you of your "shadows"; but not by way of my charge here, who looks to a homely home, and beings of flesh and blood for company, and not the fancied wraiths of fancied

crimes. To call a house possessed is an offence at law; and when the house is a judge's house—take heed, gossip, take heed, I warn you. His Honour is not the man to suffer the corruption of his kin or the branding of his property.'

He ended harshly, and turned to Brion, leaving the old woman muttering.

The boy had heard his comrade, half shocked and half amused. The castigation seemed to him to exceed the transgression. After all, though he had been fascinated and thrilled by the tale she had told him, he had not been frightened. He was a level-headed youngster, and not easily scared. Clerivault pointed from the open casement.

'See yonder,' said he, signifying a hill some mile and a half north-west of the Grange: 'Rippon Tor, they call it, that hath its logging-stone; and, farther north, that's Hey Tor, with its mighty crown of rock. We'll climb it together, and get a view will do you good. Out west there stands Buckland Beacon, that we may yet live to see fired, and south of it the waters of the Dart, where they bend about Holne Chase. That's a sweet and noble demesne, owned by the lords of Buckland, but the house let now to Sir John Medley, a rich City Knight and rogue from London, that hath a fair young daughter, Mistress Joan yclept, his sole child and heiress.'

So he continued, expatiating on the beauties of the moor, and planning expeditions here and there to gorge, or glen, or hidden hamlet, where draughts of golden cider were to reward the sweet and happy toil of adventure. He was eager to dwell on the near approach of the long warm days, eager not only to

reconcile the boy to his lot, but to kindle in him an enthusiasm for it. And Brion, in face of those fervent adjurations, was not slow to catch fire, or to forget, in bright anticipation of long walks and rides, and hawkings, perhaps, and fishings in the clear tumbling streams, the sadness of his home surroundings.

As presently they turned from the window, a thought occurred to him, not for the first time.

'Clerivault,' he said, 'why is this my room so fair above all others in the house?'

'Well, it was a chapel in the old days,' answered the man, but after a moment's pause, and with, it would seem, a certain reluctance.

CHAPTER VI

SOME NEW FRIENDS

DAYS passed, and largely in the glamour of those expeditions which were to breed in the boy something more than a reconcilement with his destiny. And indeed, what with vigorous exercise, health, a mighty appetite and fine weather, Brion was soon in the mind to welcome solitude, though in a desolate mansion, as a condition as admirable as any which could have befallen him. He and Clerivault, his constant companion, were for ever on foot or on horseback, galloping over the moors, penetrating to town or village, or scrambling over rock and fell in search, pedantically, of the picturesque. They climbed the great tors, and swung the famous logging-stone; they explored the loveliest ravines, and overhung, from the rocky salient guarding Holne Chase, the waters of one of the fairest rivers in England. They fished—with small success, and shot —with none, at fowl of sorts, using for the latter purpose Clerivault's pistols, which were short Italian 'daggs,' so called, heavy weapons with wheel-locks, and the last to prove effective against nimble game. Then in the early evening they would return, fagged and happy, to a great delectable meal, served up in Phineas cook's most incomparable manner.

This Phineas, like the true artist he was, never condescended to be less than himself, though in such minor matters as the gratifying of a green palate. He had

been long with the Judge—who, in the business of the table, was something of an epicure—and, like the other three lealties, was sufficiently his devoted henchman to be ready to follow his fortunes into virtual exile. He was a little long-faced man, with a pointed scrap of beard, and a serene conceit of himself so equable as to be impervious to provocation. His hands were very white and capable, and he habitually wore round his neck the gold chain with which the Lord Chancellor had decorated him on the occasion of a famous banquet given by his master to the Benchers of Gray's Inn. A cook by profession, he was a genius by intuition, and handled his tools, as a supreme painter his brushes, with the unerring vision which in a few touches will give form and distinction to another's mediocre design. An ordinary recipe became with him one of those plagiarisms which transcend their originals. In matters of sauce he was a rigid purist, holding that selection was the keynote of efficiency, and greatly abominating those indiscriminate jumbles of ingredients with which lesser cooks sought to cover up their ignorance and achieve a chance applause. As every soul was said to have its affinity in the world, so every dish, in his creed, had its certain complement, and it was no more right or moral to introduce a fifty different herbs and other garnishes into the pot, in the hope of the right one being there, than it would be to furnish a man who wanted a wife with a harem to seek amongst. Such Apician miscellanies as 'lovage, coriander, mint, rue, anchovies, pepper, pine-nuts, raisins, wine, sweet cheese and oil,' as a relish to boiled goose, he regarded as enormities, and to be counted only with the filthy potions brewed by Mrs Harlock and her like; but the

cook who aspired to the term master should aim rather at the perfect sympathy of meat and seasoning, whereby each, like a loving partner, should prove its own value by emphasising the virtues of the other. To this end simplicity was the first and surest of means, combined with a perfect instinct for the hypostatic union of flavours, and for that psychologic moment reached by the revolving spit when 'done to a turn' was inaudibly announced from its well-basted burden. There was none could make plain roast and boiled more delectable than Phineas; as indeed Brion and his companion had good reason to know. He loved to have a hearty appetite to operate on, and would stand and expound his views to the boy, much entertaining that young gentleman, while watching his vigorous enjoyment of the good things provided for him. He liked the youngster, as indeed all associated with him came to do, at first for the master's sake, but soon enough for his own. He was a prepossessing stripling, in truth, comely in appearance, but attractive more by reason of his gentleness and native urbanity than his looks. And at the same time he had a courageous spirit, to which Phineas loved to supply the animal fuel. There was no stint of that, at least, at the Grange. The bills of fare comprised haunch of venison, wild boar's cheek, boiled leg of pork, salt buttock of beef (outside cut), sheep's head (served with an electuary of unknown composition, but entertaining honey), oyster of veal, and other such goodly pièces de resistance. There was a certain 'Karum' pie, hoarding in its ambrosial depths treasure of beccaficoes and savoury jellies, to which Brion was mightily partial; and fish there was in plenty, turbots and soles and lobsters from the coasts, and lampreys

from the rivers; while, for game, they had moorland partridges, and knots and godwits and hares. To enumerate the delicacies would be idle, though mention must be made of a peculiarly appetising broth with a boned duck floating in it, of a thoughtful hash of calves' feet, and of a ragout of cocks'-combs with savoury balls which had to be eaten to be understood. But these were kickshaws, and, in Phineas's philosophy, less illustrative of the culinary art than the plain joint made beautiful. His crowning achievement in their respect was a particular cream sauce, which, like the relish invented by the Marquis de Béchamel, was of that seductiveness that it could have made a mother-in-law, with all her bitterness, 'go down.'

One might imagine that, with all this gastronomic petting, Brion would end by thinking too much of his food; but, indeed, in his healthy young mind, he regarded it only as he regarded sleep, a need of nature the better for being sound. And that was Phineas's own view.

'A dinner remembered,' said he, 'is a dinner discredited, and that forgotten as soon as eaten does best honour to the cook. For it is honour to be the begetter of generous thoughts, which spring from good digestion; and a man if he be fed well, and as a proper cook should desire him, ponders not on that he hath consumed, but rather on the great visions which arise from his content and satisfaction. Whereas, should the food itself linger in his mind, it is odds but what he will presently have cause to wish both it and himself at the devil. All human functions are tolerable only to the moment when one is conscious of them: and that is digestion, to which your cook is physician in trust, as it were, to prevent what the others seek to cure.'

'Methinks,' said Brion, 'the best physician is plainness and frugality. The Spartans lived on black broth alone, and were brave soldiers and healthy men.'

'Anan?' said Phineas.

'They were a race,' answered the boy; and added, with a twinkle: 'other than that one who, tasting their broth, declared he no longer wondered over their indifference to death, seeing that this was all they had to live for. Good Master Angell, too, was wont to say that Heaven blesses a simple appetite.'

Phineas struck his nose with his forefinger three several times.

'These Churchmen,' said he—'they will dogmatise. What mandate had he from Heaven to speak for it? I could say that Heaven loves to encourage good eating; and could give you book for it too.'

'Give it,' said Brion.

'Hast heard of St Patrick,' answered Phineas—'the apostle of the Kerns? Well, God quit him for that—he was a good and holy man, for all he had his moments of weakness. One came to him on a fast day, when the sight of two fat pork chops on a platter was too much for his resolution. But he had no sooner helped himself thereto than, his conscience smiting him, with a prayer to Heaven for forgiveness he cast them from him into a pail of water standing by, whereon they were instantly converted, by God's grace, into a brace of lusty trout. Nothing less, look you—no red herrings from Heaven. And what, I would ask you, of Cana its feast? Was it your black broth Christ changed the water into? Go to, for your plainness and frugality—and with your mouth full of my veal pasty!'

Brion laughed: 'If it had been that to tempt St Patrick!'

He was popular with them all, as said: but with none so much as Clerivault, who regarded him as his especial trust and intimate, and was jealous of any fancied encroachment by another on his preserves. He taught the boy the use of arms, and practised him in sword play, against the time when he should have a 'rapier and a baselard with a sheath of red' of his own to hang at his side. That was a reminiscence not unreferred to, you may be sure. Brion, as he grew in confidence with this comrade, would open his sedate young heart to him, and ever a little and a little less shyly; until once he ventured on a direct question:—

'I have often wondered and wanted to ask you, Clerivault. You remember that day, so long ago, when we first met?'

'Ay,' answered the other curtly, and with a watchful manner, as if he foresaw what was coming and prepared himself with his guard.

'You would know of me, would you not,' said Brion, 'where Master Angell lived?'

'Ay,' was the short answer again.

'Yet you had no need to learn.'

'Had I not? Your reason, an it please you?'

'Because you knew already; else had Master Angell not asked astonied what brought you there, and, out of your wont, by day.'

Clerivault made an acrid face.

'A certain Grecian was heard to remark,' said he, 'that he detested a boon-companion with a memory. Are my sins, then, to find me out, and in the name of friendship?'

'So you own you meant to deceive me?'

'It would seem so.'

'Why, Clerivault?'

'I will tell you, like an honest man. It was not in his Honour's then design to confess your relationship, and I, who acted as his purse-bearer, judged it advisable to give your sharp infancy no chance scent to nose on. Wherefore, though I had been there many times before, I appeared ignorant.'

'And you came, out of your wont, by day? Why?'

'These whys are like house-flies. Brush one away and another settles. I came, if you would know, to bring a message. There's a simple answer to a simple question.'

Brion pondered awhile, his clear eyes fixed on the other's conscious face.

'Had the message aught to do, I marvel,' said he suddenly, 'with two that accosted me at the Queen's passing the next day? They were the Lord of Leicester for one, and with him a sweet lady.'

Clerivault gave a little gasp, and looked up, and down again.

'God's 'slid!' he exclaimed; and bit his lip. 'What mad question is this?'

'Is it mad?' said the boy. 'Well, then, it is mad. Yet there were the two, riding alone and seeming to look for my master and me, where we stood, by his directing, apart from the others. And when they espied us they drew rein, and the lady bade me to put foot in her stirrup; and she held me, and, as she held, she kissed my lips and whispered if I was happy.'

Clerivault cleared his throat, yet answered as if something still obstructed it :—

'A mere casual impulse, Sir—take my word on't. Something moved her in thy baby face: perchance she had lost a child. And, as to this Leicester, as you call him——'

'Not I. It was one spake him so, riding back with a message from the Queen. And the lord was wrathful to be so confessed, and struck the man with his whip across the face, so that I could have struck him in his turn.'

Clerivault, with his mouth forming an answer, stared as if petrified. He had never yet seen such fire in this discreet dove's eyes, and it opened his own.

'In law, hearsay is no evidence,' he began, muttering; but the dove stooped upon him with flaming vision:—

'Do you dare to question my word?'

Clerivault started back.

'Cry you mercy, Sir! Not for the wide world. I but spoke by instinct the fashion of the trade. Well, I see that blood will out. I must mind for the future my p's and q's.'

The boy was still incensed. There was, in truth, a little devil of pride in him, not often to be provoked, but, when it flared, significant of a thing or two. It was a lesson to Clerivault, in whose manner thenceforth some little show of patronage was exchanged for a greater deference.

'It was the Lord of Leicester, I say,' said Brion.

'It was the Lord of Leicester, since you declare it,' answered the other, with a downcast look.

'Why do you not answer my question, then?'

'What question, please your grace? My memory is consumed in this fire.'

'What connection there might be between the

message you brought and the appearance of those two on the road?'

Clerivault's brow went down and his lower lip up. Desperation was making him sulky.

'The message was not mine,' he said, in a tone of chill civility. 'As well ask the conduit what message it bears from the river to the fountain.'

Brion flung away. He was in a passion, and he had let his passion defeat his particular purpose. He had meant this question to Clerivault to serve as prelude to another even more curious and intimate; and now he could never put it. His pride would prevent him.

But reason soon reasserted itself, and with it came shame that he could have treated his so faithful henchman and comrade with such unkindness. And so, no sooner was his heat departed, but he sought out the poor fellow, and very sweetly asked forgiveness for his rudeness, saying that the fault was his own to have tempted an abuse of confidence, and that, in refusing him, Clerivault had not only vindicated his own honour, but had taught him a lesson in faith which he would not be quick to forget. All of which he said very feelingly, but with a stately manner, as though bestowing his own punishment on himself; but it so wrought on his hearer as quite to overcome him with emotion.

'Thou dear soul!' he cried. 'If I might seek thy confidence without hurt to my trust!'

But Brion stayed him, with the action of a young prince.

'It would hurt my honour more than thy trust. Say no more on it, I beseech you. I *wish* no more, and that is enow.'

'And they were friends again, but at changed angles;

the boy was a little more the patron and the man the client.

Yet it is never to be supposed that these sober and dignified relations represented the all of their comradeship. There was another side to it, which, if less sedate, was infinitely more humorous.

If Clerivault was for one part in three a rational and incorruptible sobriety, he was for the other two a fantastic braggart, and a liar of that splendid order which soars easily above the possibilities, and will not be baulked in its romances for the insignificant reason that the evidences of their untruth are there for anyone who likes to consult them. And as to making himself the hero of his own imaginings, after all, if one *is* inventing, it would be the merest quixotry to allot to another the brightest part in one's extravaganzas. He was, in fact, exactly as his master had described him, a tridimensional mixture of gentleman, rhapsodist, and coxcomb, the whole being held together like a bunch of wind-giddy feathers in a jackanapes' cap, by the steadfast jewel of fidelity.

Brion came very early to see into what was in truth a quite lovable transparency in his comrade, and, while measuring him leniently, to take a rather wicked pleasure in drawing him out and on, withal with a due consideration for his feelings. He was careful, for one thing, not again to offend that super-patriotism which was such a fervid quality in the dear fantastic—on the principle, possibly, that your convert is ever your ultra dogmatist. But, however that might be—and trustworthy evidence on his own part was not to be hoped of Harlequin; perhaps he himself was ignorant of his origin—love of his England glowed like a fierce

fire in his bosom. He often rhapsodised on the great vague things he and Brion were destined in good time to accomplish for their country; he would rant and hyperbolise in mystic terms, touched with real vision, on her mighty destiny. The boy would mark him, with a whimsical gravity, and wonder what great place he supposed Fate had assigned him in her scheme of things. He hardly appeared the sort of instrument she would choose for carving a way to new dominion: even, soldierly, Brion had already a secret suspicion that he was not quite the shrewd swordsman he professed, since he himself, for all his inexperience, could sometimes better him at the foils. But certainly he was full of gas; and that might exalt him. The young rascal delighted to supply the fuel for that expansion.

'Clerivault,' he said once, 'it would seem that my Uncle, from what he let fall to me, holds you in great esteem.'

He could venture on so much, while remembering the Judge's warning. He would have liked to hear Clerivault's own version of the dramatic happenings which had first outlawed, then inlawed him, so to speak, on the principle, one might assume, of setting a thief to catch a thief; but he could not admit a knowledge of the facts without betraying the great man's confidence.

The other smoothed his chin, with an ineffably complacent expression.

'Ha!' said he. 'He might admit he has reason.'

'I know,' said the boy, nodding his head soberly. 'It is not every man's good fortune to be gifted with a paragon.'

'Nathless I would not grudge it him,' said Cleri-

vault; 'for in truth no man deserves it better, or could more appreciate its moral and corporeal value. Yet was it good fortune, as thou sayest, to light on this fallen star, hung never in the constellation of the scales, but shed like a glittering gem from Mars his fiery breast. I had not been a lawyer but for love of one man.'

'He found you fallen, you say, Clerivault? How?'

'No matter. Kings fall: I have Kings' blood in my veins, ha! He who hath commanded knows how to serve. I have served and do serve like a King. To the greater light the lesser is but a shadow; and yet it is a light. I am myself, Kingly; and yet I am no King. But when all men shall be Kings and all Kings men, then shall the world open its eyes and see the Millennium. And in the meantime I serve, Kingly.'

Brion opened *his* eyes to this astonishing rodomontade. Laughter quivered in him, though he dared not yield to it.

'In what way Kingly?' said he.

'As one who leads, Sir,' answered Clerivault, 'while feigning but to follow.'

'And do you lead my Uncle, while so feigning?'

'Soft, in your ear, now! Gray's Inn might tell a tale.'

'Gray's Inn?'

'Ha! You know not. 'Twas there we had our dwelling—no chambers nobler or more noted; and he who occupied them a fitting brilliant to such setting. Ancient, barrister, bencher—he had stood to reach the highest honour, that of duplex reader, but that sour Fortune tripped him. He shone, Sir; and, if like the carbuncle, which, being exposed to the sun, and

thereafter set in darkness, repays the light it borrows, still—he shone. I say no more.'

He need not. The implication was plain to demonstration.

'Wert thou the sun, Clerivault,' said Brion, with a little gasp, 'that made this carbuncle so to shine?'

The paragon coughed.

'No sun, Sir, by your favour—I know my limitations—yet mayhap with some power to illuminate. He might consult me—I do not say—there have been judgments passed for his, which—but it ill becomes a man to praise his own wares. You have never heard speak of our "mootings"?'

'No. What were they?'

'Disputations, Sir, convened in the Great Hall to argue moot points of law. There would be a counterfeit case stated, and counsel appointed to represent both plaintiff and defendant. Then was the cream of legal subtleness displayed, and not least in the devising of new theses for discussion. I could tell of one that possessed a happy adroitness in such contrivings, though he might not appear in person to claim the credit of his own inventions. But, like the puppet-master who, himself unseen, pulls the strings that set his dolls a-dancing, he was the known originator of some debates most admired in their subjects. So with our masques and revels, wherein, were some great fresh device apparent, one would be named for its certain author who shall not be named by me. No, not rack nor the strappado should wring divulgement from these lips.'

So he would ' gas,' in the modern term, and to the infinite tickling of his young hearer, who, nevertheless,

found his affection for the queer creature increased rather than diminished by this knowledge of his weakness. Ingenuous vanity is ever the most forgivable.

In the meantime the days went on, and passed into weeks, and still the master of the house delayed to appear. Brion wondered, and would sometimes put his wonder into words, seeking the reason of Clerivault. But it was so apparent that the man either knew of none, or, if he knew, meant to keep his own counsel in the matter, that soon the boy desisted, and resolved philosophically upon making the best of the situation as he found it, and leaving all conjecture for present content. And that was the wise course to take, however sudden the turn which brought it to an end.

CHAPTER VII

THE OLD WELL HOUSE

One night Brion woke suddenly from a disturbed sleep, and sat up in the dark, his heart thumping. He had been dreaming, and in his dreams it had seemed to him that something shadowy and noiseless had entered by the door, and come and bent above his bed, its features a white blur in a pall of blackness. So strong was his sense of a presence even then in the room, or only recently gone from it, that he held his breath to hearken for any indication of its whereabouts; and so sitting, a little fearful, was presently reassured by the sound of the great door in the hall below being undisguisedly barred and bolted. Whereat, concluding that it was earlier than he had supposed, and that the household was only now making secure for the night, he lay down again, convinced he had been dreaming, and was soon deep in the waters of oblivion.

But the waking morning brought disquiet with it. No Clerivault appeared from the neighbouring closet where he was used to sleep, to attend, as was his wont, upon his young charge, and Brion, after a period of restless waiting, was fain to dress himself, which he did with all speed and in a growing uneasiness. Leaving his room at the end, and going by Clerivault's door, he found it opened, and old Harlock within, feigning to busy herself over the unused bed. But she was there,

it was evident by her pretence of answering a question that was not put, to invite comment.

'Eh?' she whined. 'What sayest? I'm slow to hear.'

'I did not speak,' said Brion. 'Where is Clerivault?'

'Where?' she answered. 'Ask his master for that. I'm ne'er in the goodman's confidence.'

'His master!'

'Ay, his master and ours—bondslaves to his will. A may come and go, and do with us as a lists. Be his purpose dark or light, in blindness are we sworn to him, to see naught and follow at his call.'

'May come—my Uncle!' exclaimed the boy, all astounded: 'has he been here, then?'

'Been and gone,' answered the old woman. 'Came like a thief in the night, to steal nothing but away again.'

'And took Clerivault with him?'

'Took feather-head—ay, as a man in love with Folly might pluck and put a pasque-flower behind his ear. They're long ridden off together.'

Brion heard in dismay. His superstitious tremors of the night had owed, then, to woefuller presage than any imagined hauntings. To lose his friend, thus, without warning, without a word! it was grievous. Something swelled in his breast. How could Clerivault have left him so? And yet he might have had no choice. Who was he to cross the will of that dark masterful spirit who controlled his destinies? It must have been his Uncle, the boy was now convinced, who had come into his room in the night, and looked down upon him. The thought thrilled him, half awfully, half glowingly. He pictured his own unconscious face, and that other,

white and austere, bent above it—and the silent entry and the silent withdrawal. Why? Why had his Uncle arrived thus in the night, and as obscurely vanished, leaving no trace of his visit but that dreaming memory? And yet it was a memory he would not be without. He stood staring at the old woman.

'I am in the dark,' he said.

Her eyes, like two round stones, were set fixedly on his.

'Thou art not the first in this house to be,' she said. 'Secrets and mysteries before thy time have encompassed those that dwelt herein. Their shadows yet linger in the rooms and walk upon the stairs. Thou art not the first to feel the darkness and unrest. There is always coming and going here; ay, even when it is emptiest of mortal life—always something to see, though thou seest it not. This is the place where plots are laid in darkness and fulfilled in silence.'

To say that Brion, hearing her, was conscious of a passing chill is not to underrate his healthy young sanity. He believed the old creature crazy: yet there is an eeriness, after all, in crazy company. What she said might have no significance, but somehow it assorted drearily with the lonely and desolate house and with the strange movements of its inmates. His physical shiver converted itself, however, in shame of its own weakness, into a shrug of irritable dissent.

'I am not afeard of your plots and shadows, old mother,' said he, with petulant scorn. 'It is enough shadow for me that my friend hath left me, without a word.'

She nodded her head grimly, thinning her lips.

'Brave spirit,' she said. 'It shall need all of itself, maybe, in the days to come.'

He turned from her, with an impatient exclamation, and began to descend the stairs. Half way down he met the boy William, mounting hot-faced towards him. This was a buxom swain, on the near side of manhood, rosy and bucolic. His face was round as a gooseberry; an incipient corn-gold beard frizzled on the spit of his chin. He pulled up, and twitched his forelock with a breathless grimace.

'Was comin', Mars Brion, to help ee to dress,' he said, panting. 'Mars Phineas a bade me humbly to tender myself.'

'William,' said the boy, 'did Clerivault—did my Uncle say when they would be back again?'

The scullion shook his noddle soberly.

'Mars Clerivault a' bade me to tell ee to be of good heart and not to forget him. Mars Bagott was in a main hurry to be gone. A mounted to thy chamber with a taper while the cattle were a-baiting, and was off as soon as down.'

'Whence did he come and whither ride, William—dost know?'

But William knew nothing—only that the Judge had arrived unexpectedly by night, big Nol attending, and, after the briefest stay, had left again, taking the porter and Clerivault with him. Neither had Phineas, when presently questioned, any more definite information to give. They both, it was evident, felt for the boy, and wished to do all in their power to make up to him for the loss he had suffered, and to ameliorate the loneliness of his lot. But a sense of grievance was on Brion, and his response was neither grateful nor gracious. He felt betrayed, in this committal of him to virtual solitude and neglect, where he had been led

by his comrade to count upon cheerfulness and bright company. It was cruel, he thought, so to have inveigled him on false pretences from a loved and happy home, and he could not be induced, in that first sharpness of his affliction, to practise the philosophy which after all was native to his young temperament, or to look upon his desertion in any light other than that of deliberate treachery. He would touch no breakfast that morning, much to the master-cook's concern, and generally seemed inclined to prepare himself in the perversest possible way for the anchoretic ordeal which lay before him.

And in truth that ordeal proved itself, as its character developed, a sufficiently depressing affair—something comparable with that of an eaglet, say, let loose, with a clipped wing, in an empty fowl run. For the liberty that rode on horseback was for one thing denied Brion, his nag having been taken away by the visitors for a spare mount; and so was he deprived of one great incitement to forgetfulness in exercise.

No alternative was his but dreary wanderings alone, or in the company, if he would, of a bashful clown like William. Phineas was all very well for material pabulum, and could eke moralise humorously enough on his craft; but he was hardly the comrade for a rambling day on the moors. On the whole Brion preferred to be left to himself, that he might indulge, half in rancour, half in real heartache, the dejection of his mood.

And so he did, and experienced no soon reaction from it. In all the long weeks to follow unrelieved on his Uncle's visit, no word of explanation or reassurance was to reach him; but he was left to formulate

his own ideas as to the meaning of things, and to get through the weary days as best he could. At first, so miserable was he, he had no spirit to continue the open life of the hills and moors; but he would mope about the desolate house, vainly seeking distraction in its few familiar objects, or haunt the wildered grounds about it, kicking his cheerless heels among the tangled vegetation with which it was overrun.

One day, when he was so idly disposed, trying to trace out the original contour of the beds in what had been the garden, now a confused waste of weed and vegetable matter, he made a discovery. He had covered, in his aimless dawdlings, the inner circuit of the estate, stopping now and again to look over the boundary wall into the dead stagnation of the moat, or to watch the oily scum on its surface open and shut like a mouth whenever he pitched a stone to it to gulp and swallow. Coming round, then, by way of the porter's lodge, he ascended for the dozenth time, and in default of any brighter suggestion, to the empty rooms above the gate, only, for the dozenth time, to gaze with lack-lustre eyes from their vacant windows, and to descend again as objectless as he had mounted. Eastward of the gatehouse were ranged the empty stables, the empty byres, the empty pig-pens and barns—for the Grange had farmed its own produce in days gone by—and beyond these, in a bastion of the wall, stood the columbarium, or circular dovecote built of stone, which contained within it a revolving ladder, like a cheval-de-frise on end, used for reaching the birds where they might rest in any of the rows of little cells with which the whole surface of the interior was chambered. There were no pigeons there now, nor had been for an age;

but there was some mild excitement to be borrowed from mounting and spinning on the ladder; and Brion was contemplating that distraction, when his eye fell on the well in the courtyard which supplied the house with water. It was a familiar enough object, but never till this moment regarded by him in the light of a particular association. Was it, could it have been the very well down which the miser had cast the body of his victim those long years ago? Tingling, on tiptoe, he went to it and looked over. The hatch was closed; the bucket, the slack of its rope looped to the windlass, stood on the wall rim. And then a thought occurred to him. This well was sunk in the open for all to see, and the old woman had distinctly spoken of a well-house. Where?

Suddenly, with the birth of an idea, a thrill went through him, and he started walking. He went past the stables, past the byres, past the columbarium, and so into the wild ground beyond, where he kept along the wall for a distance of fifty yards or so until he came to a dense clump of ilexes, and there stopped, his heart going a little excitedly. He had often noted and passed by this place, but had never before, for some unexplainable reason, been moved to push into it. The trees had built themselves up in a gloomy thicket high above the wall and over it, and, bridging the moat, were continued in a twin clump on the farther side. They were so grown down to the ground, so grappled to it by the long grasses which had woven themselves into the bases of the mass, as to appear impenetrable. Only a wrinkle, or suture, in the hill of sombre green seemed to betray to the sharp eyes of the boy the existence of some former passage between the foliage, now long closed in and hidden.

Brion stood and hesitated. Somehow the place awed him—its gloom, its silence, its distance from the house. There was a brooding stillness about it which seemed to breathe of death and mystery. Then, characteristically enough, he seized his determination in hand, and made the plunge. He was of those whose instinct is always rather to challenge a terror than by flying to call it after them.

Now, he had no sooner parted the boughs than he saw his suspicion confirmed. Very faint, very blurred, yet still distinguishable, the mark of a half-obliterated path ran under the trees. With just one sigh, a little shaken, he entered and let the green covert close behind him. And then he felt a shock of relief. It was not near so dark within the great thicket as its exterior would have led him to suppose. A thousand threads of gray light, rained down from overhead like the jets in a shower-bath, made melancholy visible there. He went forward a few steps, turned the trunk of a tree, and saw a low building before him.

It was just a stone belvedere, moss grown, green with age and neglect, but still whole and unbroken. Its area might have measured four yards square; it stood some ten feet from the ground to the spring of the roof, which was low-peaked and tiled with plates of rough-hewn stone. Its front was open for two thirds of its width, and through the aperture Brion caught sight of the low parapet of a well projecting from the floor. Tingling all through, he stole forward and looked in.

There was light enough, at least, to distinguish things by, and to stimulate both his curiosity and his fear. Here was the deadly spot, without a question, and the

sense of it was like stinging nettles in his veins. He dared not go farther, but held to the doorpost and stood staring in, on the prick of flight. He was looking into a dark and death-cold little chamber, empty save for the well, sunk in the middle of the flagged floor, and for one other rather wickedly suggestive thing. This was a huge drum wheel, ten feet in diameter, and attached by a short axle to one of the side walls. It was built of heavy wood and was shaped like a round box-lid, the open side outermost. The boy had no idea what was its purpose; but his day was the day of Holy Inquisitions and their terrific legends, and there was something in the appearance of this sinister engine to suggest a thought of racking and mangled limbs. He was peering at it fascinated, his lips parted, when something happened. From the depths of the well, in the utter stillness, rose a little clucking noise, like a gobble of low laughter. Human endurance had reached its limit. He turned and fled, and bursting, panting and white faced, into the open, almost fell over a figure that seemed to advance upon him at the moment.

But, even as he cried out—lo! it was Gammer Harlock. She had a basket on her arm, and was poking here and there among the weedy tangle in search of the simples she needed for her drugs and potions.

'Eh!' she said, never turning from her search to regard the pale lad standing beside her. 'So it's you, is it—the young heart that fears nor plot nor shadow! What ailed that cry, then, and this sound of near running, like dead leaves blown along a wintry road?'

'It is my breath shaking in me,' said Brion. 'I am winded, mother.'

He answered stoutly, but he was finely scared. He

had never so welcomed the company of this joyless old hag, or had so clung to it for human solace and reassurance. She answered, stooping as she spoke :—

'Never blown lungs so rattled, I trow, save when the heart was in the throat, like a pea in a whistle.'

He 'owned up,' with a little trembling laugh :—

'I was frightened—there, I confess it. I had never before guessed it was there, and, when I did, I went in. Mother, is it *the* well?'

For the first time she rose erect, and looked him in the face.

'A fool is a fool,' she said, 'be he ne'er so brave. Bear that in mind when next you go to look into the dark places. So ye dared? And what frighted ye?'

'It was a sound came up from the well. I thought it laughed.'

'And might it not laugh, hugging its secret all these years? Mayhap it was that laugh killed Fulk. A was found dead there, his head hanging over the well-rim. There were things in his eyes—things seen in the black under water as he lay gasping out his soul. God give him mercy!'

Brion stood silent a minute. Curiosity, enough to hold him to the spot, still fought in him for mastery over his fears.

'Did he, Fulk, use it, *as* a well?' he asked.

The old woman shook her head.

'That in the court,' she said, 'had already been sunk before his time. 'Tis an old, old pit, this—Roman. I've heard it called. It was there before the moat itself. Never bucket nor windlass has it had in my day. Like enow they were removed to the other.'

'And what is that great wheel, mother, fastened to the wall?'

He spoke with a shiver, for in some way the evil spirit of the place seemed concentrated to him in that diabolical mill. But the gammer did not know. 'Some wicked contrivance of Fulk's,' she supposed; but for what purpose it was impossible to say. It was there when she came: and that was all she knew about it.

She bent to her simples again, and, while she sought and plucked, Brion lingered near her. If she knew the reason well enough, she was flattered by the boy's dependence on her. There was a soft place for him in even her dark old heart. He was a bold beautiful child, so to have dared the terrors of that mystery which to her was an article of superstitious faith; and his flying to her in the last resort had touched her to the quick.

That night, as he was finishing his supper in the great gloomy hall, she came in to him with a handful of early daisies.

'Lay these under thy pillow, and know sweet dreams,' said she: and for some reason Brion did not laugh, but took the little blossoms from her with a wistful look into her eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APPARITION

THENCEFORTH Brion avoided the neighbourhood of the old well-house; he kept that dark cloud of ilex trees at a nervous distance, and did not even care to let his glance wander their way. This mood of superstitious fear haunted him for some time, and then began to weaken, or to change in its constitution. The eternal spirit of curiosity crept back, like a scared sheep, to examine the cause of its own panic. He was ashamed of himself for having yielded so abjectly to a portent existing, perhaps, only in his imagination: he longed to find it *in* himself to re-essay the test, and was angry because he could not at once rise to it. But the thought of the place fascinated him, and gradually, a little and a little more, drew him to venture foot again within the radius of its influence. That laugh he had heard was the laugh of Parthenope to his bewitched senses. It sickened yet it drew him. He had a feverish lust to fathom its source, and to grapple with whatever nameless horror it might reveal. That was his nature. He would come to be a tenacious fighter in his day patient to the fine limit of forbearance, but difficult to shake from his grasp, when once fastened on. Yet for long he could not bring his mind to face the great decision.

Parthenope! the siren of that black pit! What, he wondered, had been her name in life—the poor

unhappy young creature who had been so foully done to death by her master the miser? Clerivault professed to scorn the whole story; but then Clerivault was obviously a sceptic from policy. Pity at last came to alter the quality of Brion's feelings; and then he was very near the resolution he uneasily desired.

But at first, he thought, he would approach it by way of a compromise. He went out one morning, when a pale mist of sunlight was charming all the earth with beauty, and, passing through the main gate, crossed the small bridge and turned to make the circuit of the moat from the outside. That would bring him presently to the thicket of ilex trees where it was continued over against the well-house, and would enable him to view the object of his unquiet infatuation from the rear, and with the moat between. Somewhere he had heard that ghosts could not cross running water, and it was a comfort to him to believe that the water of the moat, fed by the little stream, did, however imperceptibly, move.

The clump, frowning gigantic in the mist, loomed up before him as he took an angle of the ditch. The trees here, at least on the outskirts, were less closely massed than on the other side, and one could distinguish swords and spars of glimmering light between their trunks. As he approached in the fair morning, his courage rose with his spirits, and he began to whistle: and then in an instant all the soul went out of him like a wind. He had caught sight of a woman's figure flitting and vanishing among the shadows.

He stood a full minute, his heart pulsing like the

balance spring of a watch. For a moment he felt quite sick; and then, in the reaction, furious. A sense of outrage flooded his brain. That he should be taunted and held up like this before an intangible fancy—a spectrum, a nothing! He would endure it no longer. Strung to actual passion, he started running and, desperate, without a thought for consequences, plunged in among the trees. As their gloom came about him, half blinding his eyes, he caught glimpse of the apparition, and followed in pursuit. It fled before him, a diaphanous indistinct shape, silent and elusive. But his blood was up, and instinct told him that for the sake of his own sanity he must now persist to the end. If reason could not explain a horror, it could master by facing it.

In and about the trees went the ghostly chase: one and the other, phantom and mortal, they took either side of a writhed trunk and met beyond. With a savage cry, Brion flung out his arms, and something dropped beneath them. He stooped, and his hands touched warm and throbbing flesh.

'God's 'slid!' said the boy, taking his oath from Clerivault: 'Say what art thou!'

He was panting, with set teeth: in the gloom and the wild flurry of his mood he could distinguish nothing clearly. Yet the thing under him moved and seemed material.

'I have you,' he said. 'I shall not let you go till you tell me who you are. Spirit or goblin, wait while I see your face.'

He flung the hair from his eyes, and bent, and glared down. Nothing but the obscure crown of a little hat met his vision. His hands still gripped what

they had caught. He thrust the right one into a nest of warmth, and, feeling a chin, forced it upwards. It brought into view a face, very white and, in that dimness, spiritual. Its eyes stared palely into his. He said, but in a tone into which doubt had crept, with some amazement :—

'Speak, if mortal speech be thine.'

He was answered, and breathlessly, though not as he expected.

'And mortal feeling. Will you hurt me so? I am only a girl.'

Brion, releasing his hold, stepped back a pace. This voice was human to sweetness.

'Art thou not a spirit?' he stammered.

'O! what spirit?' said the voice.

'Of her,' he said, 'that lies long ages murdered in the well yonder.'

The figure seemed to listen.

'My shoulders should convince you,' she said suddenly and plaintively. 'I thought I felt a wild beast at them.'

He put his hands to his head.

'Have I done so foul a thing? I took you for a ghost. Alack, what savage must you think me!' He held out his arms, entreating: 'I prithee let me raise thee'—but she would not accept his help, and got to her feet unaided. She trembled a little, leaning against the tree, and held one hand to her bosom. He could see her now quite clearly—a young girl, something less than his own age.

'O!' she said: 'Methinks I shall faint!'

He was ill with remorse. In the half light her feminine frailty was even exaggerated to him. She

seemed a thing of china a rough touch might have broken, and he had treated her with barbarous violence.

'What have I done!' he cried. 'Will you ever forgive me!'

He darted forward, and, though she resisted weakly, put an arm about her.

'Nay, you will fall else,' he said.

Still she struggled, panting to free herself.

'Nay!' he pleaded.

'I am well again. It has passed. I entreat you, release me. Are you all wild men here?'

'I took you for a ghost, I say.'

'Mayhap I am one.'

'Not with this warmth and softness.'

She tore herself free, and backed from him. A ray of the growing sunlight had found a passage through the green and fastened with its lips upon her face. It was a very pretty one, sweet as tinted wax; and the mouth was blushing to that kiss. Gazing on it, some sense, hitherto unfelt, unknown, opened to life in Brion like a delivered bud.

'Boy!' said the girl, with disdain: 'Boy!'

'I shall be a man betimes,' said Brion; 'and before you are a woman.'

She opened her lips as if to retort, found nothing to say, and moved to go. Her manner was all at once stately and self-possessed. She walked like a proud little lady, and, turning her head over her shoulder, bade her assailant a stiff good-morrow.

'May I not see you from the dark wood?' said Brion; and 'I forbid you to come with me,' she answered, and walked on.

Nevertheless, he followed her at a distance; when, nearing the fringe of the copse on its east side, what was his surprise to see her already mounted and riding away upon a little ass, which had apparently been tethered there awaiting her return all the time. She never once looked round, but, skirting the moat, vanished in the direction of the moor.

CHAPTER IX

TRANSFORMATION

A WONDERFUL brief episode, as poignant as it had been evanescent! Who was she? The dolefuller spirit was all forgotten by Brion for the time being in the glamour engendered of that soft and radiant apparition. So were forgotten the loneliness, the desolation, the dreary emptiness of his existence. He dreamt of her by day and he dreamt of her by night. Would he ever see the dear subject of his dreams again? His longing was so great he could not but believe it must be assuaged. He had thought he had taken but light stock of his vision when in its presence; now, apart from it, he remembered its every tone and feature. Perhaps he exaggerated its beauty. She was a pretty girl, a little of the slumberous type, with a soft white skin as faintly flushed at the cheeks as if a rose had flicked them; but nothing transcendent—only warmly human. She lacked, if anything, on the side of animation; even when pursued, she had not fled like a willing doe, feeling a joy in motion; she had been easily captured. But there were the eyebrows, straight umber pencillings, so many shades darker than the hair where it winged loosely back under the shadow of the little broad-brimmed hat, with its roll of gray-green taffeta; and there were the eyes that sheltered under them, blue sleepy children full of love. They were enough in memory for Brion, upon whom they had wrought the

transformation which ends the rough and tumble pantomime of boyhood. He was harlequin henceforth, and she the elusive passion-flower of his pursuit.

Judge him with gravity. Not yet sixteen—perhaps, but for his reserved disposition and solitary life, the transformation had been longer delayed, and had burned with a less romantic intensity when it arrived. But this vision had come upon him at an emotional pass, when to the melancholy of his days was added the depression of a morbid superstition. It had been the revelation of a sweet humanness, opening like a flower in the midst of that dark enigma, which had taken him like health out of sickness.

Whence had she come, and why been attracted to that haunted spot? Thinking of her, shadowy and indistinct in her gray cloak and kirtle, he did not wonder that, accepting the association of the place, she had appeared to him a spirit until her voice had dispelled the illusion. It had been a soft voice, which no excitement could lift to unmusicalness. What would he give to hear it once more and addressed in kindness to himself?

Now, one instantly healthy effect this awakening had on him was to send him abroad again hawking over the moors. Thither had she gone, and there, presumably, was to be sought. He had a confidence that somehow he would alight on her again, and without seeking, however cautiously, to identify and run her to earth. As to that he was jealous, too, of making his quest a public matter: it would dilute the heady romance of the situation, and deprive it of its most intimate charm. So he breathed no word of his secret to living soul, but carried it in his breast, like an anachronous electric

torch, himself alone aware of the light which dwelt within him, awaiting on his touch either to flash into being or to vanish.

He took to wandering far afield in these days, even affecting to himself a topical interest in his explorations, while his eyes were unceasingly alert for some sign or token of their real objective. But enough pride remained to him to make him feign a nonchalance he was remote from feeling. He returned to angling, as it were to give some colour to his persistent haunting of the moors, and, recalling Clerivault's instructions, dabbed and dibbled assiduously in the becks and streams, but without much success. However, as it happened, this pretext did actually at last lead him to the attainment of the company he coveted.

He had pushed, one glowing afternoon in May, to a point on the moor, where a couple of little sturdy brooks, running separately in their valleys, came together, like two romping dogs, and headed straight in one course for the Dart. South of him lay Holne Chase, where the rich City Knight dwelt—a beautiful domain contained within an arm of the river, here sunk in a rocky ravine whose heights were thick with foliage. Northward, rising above the heave and tumble of green, stood Buckland Tor, the beacon planted on its summit like a great red tulip waiting to flower; and at his feet bubbled the pretty rivulet, swirling and eddying, and in places returning upon itself to linger in still pools very inviting for a fisherman's purpose.

Brion, hiding behind a convenient bush, got ready his tackle. This consisted of a twelve-foot fir rod, painted of a pale green with verdigris and linseed oil; of a line contrived of horse-hairs, in lengths tapering

from a couple at the hook to seven at the base, and dyed of a glass colour in a concoction of October ale, soot, walnut tree juice and alum, and, finally, of a box of natural stone-flies, hatched out from the caddis worms then swarming in great quantities in the brooks and burns. Now of these flies he took a brace, and, spitting them on the hook, head to tail, cautiously projected his rod, himself concealed, over a likely pool, and let the bait bob gently up and down near the surface of the water—in the process called indifferently daping or dibbing or dippling, which is to imitate the action of a fly dancing—when, to his delight, after his scarce beginning, he felt a jerk and pull at his rod top; and there were the flies gone under in the midst of an oily ring of water, and a lively weight tugging at his hold of them. He was so excited for the moment as quite to forget his heartache; but all his thoughts were concentrated on the glory of his capture, and whether, having no net, he would be able to land it without his line snapping. Holding himself cool, however, and biding his time, as Clerivault had taught him, he presently felt the efforts of the fish to slacken; when, with a steady lift, he raised it clear of the pool and swung it swiftly to the bank, where it lay kicking and gasping, a grayling good fifteen inches long. Surveying his prize with rapture, he stooped to release it from the hook, when, glancing up as he knelt, he saw something which on the instant struck him motionless.

The side of the hill on which he looked sloped down to the glen, and was much confused with bush and foliage for two-thirds of its height; but above and beyond it broke into open spaces, which were multiplied continuously until a summit of bare grass was reached;

and on this ridge, silhouetted against the sky, cropt a little donkey.

Brion waited, while the shock of tingling blood in his veins subsided: then very hurriedly he rose, and, discarding fish and flies and tackle, began to climb the hill in as straight a line as he could make for the small dusk object perched up aloft. Picking his way by bush and boulder, he soon enough lost sight of it; but the open ground once reached would enable him to correct his course, and it was for that he was striving when a little suppressed cough, uttered from somewhere close at hand, brought him to a stop as instant as though he had answered to a 'stand and deliver.'

He stood at the moment beside a great rock, clothed in a plush of lichen, which stuck from the hillside in a leafy place, and it seemed that the sound had come from behind that covert. Listening, and hearing no more, he turned and, wading in a sea of green, doubled the corner of the promontory—and saw her. She sat cross-legged like a Turk, her hands clasped about her knees, in a little mossy alcove so formed for a natural bower that nothing could have been prettier or more secure. There was a fence about it of the silver-birch sapling; its floor was level grass; hidden from all else, she could yet command through the trees a view of the lovely glen, with the shining river looping through it. Brion, standing waist-deep in bush, looked up at his goddess, like a young Leander rising from the sea; and she, for her part, returned his look—it seemed without apprehension.

So they remained, both speechless, till something happened: two little tell-tale dimples suddenly appeared at the wings of the girl's short nose and flickered

there. They meant—a characteristic feature which Brion came to love—that she must break the spell or laugh.

'I am not going to laugh,' she said, instantly and haughtily, to Brion's expectant eyes. 'What are you doing here?'

'Is it a private seat?' answered the boy. 'I had not known it.'

'If I choose to make it private——' began the girl.

'You should not cough,' he said.

'If I happen to have a cold——'

'You do not look as if you had.'

'Thank you for the rudeness. It is only such as I should expect from you.'

'You remember me, then?'

'Alack! I have good reason.'

'I prithee forgive me, mistress. You would, if you knew how I had suffered in my mind. I thanked you for that cough!'

'Did you think it was uttered to attract you?'

'If I dared to hope so!'

'Insolence! Well, it was.'

'It was!' He cried it in rapture. 'Then you wanted to speak to me—to forgive me?'

'I will hear your story first.' So the inquisitive jade confessed herself.

'O, O! May I come up beside you?'

She regarded him from under superior lids; and then the little dimples flickered again. Leaning back against the rock, she patted the turf beside her.

'Come.'

He was by her side in a moment. He could hardly believe in his happiness. She was the prettiest flower

of a maid he had ever seen—hat and garb all the gray dove of his memory.

'If you knew,' he said; 'if you knew!'

'What, please?'

'How I have dreamt of this meeting. Ever since that day I have been looking and longing for you.'

'Methinks I should not let you so speak to me. Besides, I am little enough to look at.'

'I think you are my Heaven, Mistress.'

'You speak bold for a boy, Master Middleton.'

'What! You know my name?'

'Is it a secret, then? Who does not know whose name on these moors?'

'I know not yours.'

'Would you know it?'

'*Would* I!'

'I think I shall not tell you.'

'Then I will ask none other than yourself, lest coarser lips should desecrate it.'

'You are old for your years. What are they?'

'Yet I am old for them! Will you tell me your name, and I will answer?'

'What fashion of name likes you in a woman?'

'Yours.'

'Well, I have allowed you too long. I must go.'

'O! not yet!'

'This moment. What brought you up the hill?'

'I saw a donkey browsing, and hoped it might be yours.'

'It was my Gritty: she loves me like a dog, and bears me—like an angel. If it were not for her——'

'Why do you stop?'

'I think I should put a milestone round my neck and drown.'

Brion wondered. What tragedy spoke here—apart from the verbal accident? The young face was suddenly clouded; the voice spoke in dejection. But he had had already, in little Alse, some experience of the small tragedies of girlhood, and was not inclined to attach too much importance to their manifestations.

'Is it like that?' he said sympathetically. 'Then, if one donkey can save you, two might make you happy.'

'Yourself?' she said, her eyebrows lifted at him. 'So you are a donkey for wishing to know me?'

'Ay, if losing me, you will promise to drown yourself.'

She looked at him, the sleepy merriment come back to her eyes; then got to her feet, and he with her.

'That is another matter,' she said. 'I have heard a proverb that two proud men cannot ride one ass, and, by the token, one woman cannot ride two asses. I wish you good-even, Sir.'

'O! You are not going?'

'Indeed, yes.'

'You have neither forgiven me nor heard my story.'

'Both will keep.'

'Then you will let me come again—to this pretty bower?'

'Why not?'

'And meet you here?'

'Nay, I said not that. What was the fish you caught?'

'It was a grayling.'

'They say the stream here is full of them. Good luck to your further fishing, Sir. I must away.'

'At least let me put you on your Gritty.'

'In good earnest, no.' She looked genuinely alarmed.

'Why not?'

'Because, if you would know, the hill-top where she grazes is bare, and open to the scrutiny of eyes.'

'What eyes?'

'Some in the Chase yonder, perchance.'

'Holne Chase!' Brion opened *his* eyes in wonderment. 'Do you come from there?'

The girl, hanging her head, gave ever so little a nod with it.

'Mistress,' cried Brion, at a wild venture: 'I think Joan the sweetest name in all the world.'

She glanced at him askance: 'Have you guessed my secret?' and, putting her finger rosily to her lips, bade him stay where he was, and not attempt to follow her. And with that she vanished round the rock, leaving the boy standing as if stupefied.

Joan, sole child and heiress of the wealthy Knight! and he, a penniless dependent on a kinsman's bounty! What would come of it? What could?

With a sigh he turned to the rock, and tracing on it in invisible characters the name Joan Medley, put his lips to it as if it were a face.

CHAPTER X

CONFIDENCES

So began the idyll of a boy and girl. Their preliminary fencing with one another had been all a make-believe: they had been born to meet, and Fate had no real equivocations for them. Frank, affectionate, and without self-consciousness, the tie between them naturally formed itself into an innocent love-knot, and through it was transmitted a mutual confidence which asked no account of whys and wherefores.

The very next day, at the same hour, Brion returned to the glen, and climbed the hill to the hidden bower. Somehow he believed that he would find his lady ensconced there: and there he found her. She essayed only a brief pretence of surprise—and she was looking prettier than ever. He admired all the points in her which a man would have admired; but with better than a man's eyes. The pink and white, the little tapering fingers and shapely arms, the cup of her throat, the soft provocation of her lips and rounded chin—they moved him not to the beatitude of passion but of reverence. If he had coveted to kiss anything of her, it would have been, holily and fearfully, her cheek.

'You again?' she said. She was seated exactly in her former posture.

'Did you not expect me?' asked Brion.

'Think you I should have come here, an I had?'

'I hope so: I believe so.'

'*You believe!*' In the face of her professed astonishment he saw the dimples flicker, and felt safe.

'I am coming up,' he said. 'Prithee make room for me, Joan.'

She opened her eyes.

'No room for insolence'—she shifted ever so little—'and when I cannot retort upon it.'

'You do not know my name? It is Brion. Will you speak it, that I may learn to love its sound?' He sat by her side, leaning upon his hand.

'I have not your effrontery. Brion—there!'

'Joan, I am your true knight for evermore. Shall we be sweet friends?'

'I trow you have enough without me.'

'Nay, I am a lonely boy, and not very happy.'

She glanced quickly at him, and down. A flush had come to her cheek.'

'Nor I, Brion,' she said low.

Here was revelation. The heiress, presumably spoilt, of all that wealth, and unhappy!

'Why——' he began; but she turned suddenly and put a finger on his lips.

'If we are to be friends, do not ask me. Let this be something apart from the rest—our own, with none other to share in and mar it. Will you?'

'Will I?' His tone was assurance enough.

She gave a little sigh; and looked whimsically and tenderly at him. He dared to steal her hand to his; and so they sat.

'We ought not, mayhap,' said she: 'but indeed I ache for a friend; and your gentle looks assure me, though your actions may sometimes belie them.'

'You mean that day? What brought you to the haunted copse, Joan?'

'Is it really haunted, then? I wanted to see the well.'

'You were on the wrong side of the wall for that.'

She thrilled, moving a thought closer to him.

'Tell me about it. I have heard a tale.'

He told her all he knew, including a shuddering description of his own visit to the well-house.

'I would you would take me there,' she whispered at the end.

'What! you would dare?' he asked, amazed.

'With you to fend me.'

Here was a quandary. He could not afford to show the lesser moral courage; and yet——

'We should be seen,' he said.

'O!' she answered resignedly. 'Very well.'

'Unless I could devise a plan,' he added, stung by her tone.

'Will you, Brion?' she asked eagerly; and he took his first lesson in woman's incomprehensibility.

'Leave it to me,' he said, frowning. 'Yet I marvel at your wish to return where you suffered such rudeness.'

'Did you take me for the poor maid's ghost? I wonder would *she* have laughed to have her chin so tickled.'

'Hush!' said Brion, horrified. 'It is not good to talk of the unhallowed dead so lightly.'

The girl assumed a gravity.

'I will not, then. Yet be sure I feared you more than any sucking-bear or cockatricks.'

His solemnity broke in a sputter of laughter.

'O, Joan!' he cried.

'What have I said?'

'Did you mean succuba and cockatrice?'

'Well, if I did? Whatever they may be, they could not have behaved worse than you did.'

'Joan, you are a sweet dear.'

'Brion, I hoped we should meet to-day: that is the truth. Did you come a-fishing?'

'Yes, for love. I did not need a rod for that.'

'No, the rod comes after.'

'I prithee talk not so. It is not natural, I am sure, to your lips.'

'Well, I will not,' She leaned towards him irresistibly, and he stole an arm about hers. It was all quite natural, harmless, and pretty. 'Now tell me of yourself,' she said, 'and why you are unhappy.'

He gave her his story—after a little thought—concealing nothing from her. His rather staid reserve yielded to this endearing comrade as it had never done to any other in his life before. And she listened in silence, making no comment until he had finished. Then she said, her eyes fixed reflectively on his:—

'I much marvel who the pale lady was?'

It was that incident which had dwelt in her mind above the rest. Why? Because of the intuitive woman in her, conscious and suspectful.

'Some chance stranger,' answered Brion.

'Yes,' she responded, but without conviction, and sat quiet a little while, looking in his face and abstractedly stroking his sleeve. 'Brion,' she said suddenly, 'what is a bustard?'

'Why, a bird,' answered the boy, somewhat surprised.

'O!' she said. 'But I don't see—quite—you can't be a bird.'

'*I!*'

'Sir John—I heard him once—called you the Bagott bustard.'

'Called *me*?' he exclaimed, confounded. 'Why should he speak of me at all? He does not know me, nor I him.'

'O! he knows about you—and about your Uncle, too. I tell you all the people on the moors know about one another.'

'Well, what have they—what has Sir John to say against my Uncle?'

'Why *against*, Brion? That was not my word.'

'But it should have been. I see that plain enough.'

There was silence between them for a spell, while the boy looked straight before him, frowning and a little white. Presently his companion spoke, caressingly and almost timidly :—

'You are not angry with me, Brion, are you?'

'Why should I be angry?'

'Dear'—she leant a thought nearer to him—'*I* don't mind if you *are* a bustard.'

He nodded his head, setting his teeth :—

'Gramercy for that! You mean very well—though I will not ask you what you mean. What I desire to know is Sir John's charge against my Uncle.'

'No charge, bless the boy—only a conjuncture.'

'What—conjuncture?'—his lips twitched, though he kept his frown.

'I'm afraid to tell that face. Make it kinder, Brion, or I dare not.'

'There!'

'That he hath gone into hiding, fearing an impeachment.'

'An impeachment? For what?'

'Nay, I know not.'

'Nothing?'

'Only that he is whispered to be a Papist at heart, and to have been disbenched for favouring a Papish suitor.'

The boy considered; then said quietly:—

'It may be. Withal, I see no disgrace in that.'

'No, Brion,' was the meek answer.

'Do you, Joan?'

'I am going to borrow your eyes from this time, Brion. Let me look into them. They are very kind and true, i'faith—a little sober for me, but they will be good to smile to in the glass. Well, I see now there is no harm in being a Papist.'

'Of course there is not—though I am none myself. How quick and jestingly you answer; yet methinks your activity is most in your tongue.'

'How do you mean?'

'Are you fond of exercise, Joan?'

'Not very.'

'So I should have guessed. You remind me of a white rabbit I once had—warm and soft and cuddlesome. It liked to lie in my arms.'

'You are an outrageous boy—and very insulting. I think I shall have to hate you.'

'That is a pity, because I wanted you to love me.'

'Did you, i'faith? In any case we are over-young to love.'

'It is good practice to begin young. Will you be my white rabbit, Joan?'

'By my troth, no. How my back aches, sitting thus upright.'

'Is that better?'

'Ye—yes. Brion, will you always love me?'

'O, Joan, till I die!'

'Yet you know not what you love.'

'I am content. I will not ask, since you put a seal upon my lips. Shall we meet here every day?'

'Not for worlds! Well, you must keep it a secret.'

'Marry, will I! How do you come?'

'The way you came; or, when I ride Gritty, over the hill. We are much in company, sweet dear, and much alone together.'

'You found this bower by chance?'

'Yes, by chance. What brought you here?'

'Why, you.'

'Silly! how could you know?'

'Like a diviner, by the rod, I suppose. That is one of the rewards of fishing.'

'You speak from knowledge? Ah, you are but a willy-wisp, I fear me.'

'So God mend me, I am not, Joan. Thou are the first love of mine, as thou shalt be the last.'

'Not omitting Alse?'

'Alse!' (scornfully) 'She was but a baby.'

'Well, I will believe you.'

She sighed, thrilling him all through. 'Joan,' he whispered; 'when an oath is taken on the book, one puts one's lips to it. I swear for evermore to be your most true knight and devout lover.'

The girl did not answer; but presently, without a word, she let her head droop a little away, so that the soft curve of her cheek was surrendered to him. And

rapturously, reverently, while the birds sang about, and the chiming of the water came up to them in their warm high covert, he set the signature of his fealty on that lovely tablet.

It was the ecstatic moment of Brion's life, never forgotten and never surpassed—innocence fulfilling beauty and beauty innocence, trustfully, confidingly. So to such sexless kisses angels love—the flowers that ask no fruit.

Now they sat on in silence, shy, since the pledge had been sought and yielded. Yet there seemed no thought of strangeness in it all, nor did it appear to them odd that they should be so intimate on such short acquaintance. Why should it? Do lambs meeting in the same meadow seek introductions? Reserve only comes with the consciousness of sex; and with that the happy friendliness of youth is forborne for ever.

Presently they parted, with due precautions taken against chance detection. It was not, with Brion, that he was actuated in this by any sentiment of shame or guilt, for he felt none; but that he feared for a rude end being put to his idyll. Whatever the circumstances of his pretty lady's life—and, being faithful to his promise, he would not inquire into them, much as he longed to comfort her implied unhappiness—he could not suppose for a moment that his acquaintance with her would, if discovered, be anything but wrathfully discountenanced by her father? And the reference to his Uncle had not helped to reassure him in that respect. It troubled him; but his pride as much as his love. Something in his blood was already resenting this assumed arrogance of superiority by a rich

City parvenu over a man of his Uncle's distinction. And this Sir John, moreover, according to Clerivault, was a rogue: an indubitable rogue he must be, indeed, to treat his own child so. Well, he, Brion, need have no scruples about circumventing such a man. He told himself so, swelling over a grievance which had become suddenly personal. If it was to be war between the families, Sir John should come to learn, maybe, the value of hostages in a question of accommodation. The state of dictatorial righteousness into which the young bashaw worked himself was sufficiently diverting.

But it quickly yielded to another sentiment. After all, Joan was the rogue-knight's daughter--which must seem to argue that the father could not be wholly base. How came it that so coarse a stock could yield so sweet a blossom? What a darling she was, and how great his good fortune in having lighted on her in his dreary life. She had transformed all that, converting his desert at a touch into a garden of Eden. Now the very loneliness of the place was beautiful, since it ensured their uninterrupted converse. As he went over the hill, his brain seeming wrapt in a luminous mist, he felt very happy, with a pure good happiness. Only one thing lingered in his mind to shadow and disturb it. Why had Sir John likened him to that bird?

CHAPTER XI

TWO'S COMPANY

MOTIONLESS as the trunk against which he leaned, Brion stood waiting in the ilex grove. It was a still misty morning, with a blurr of sun in the East, like a lamp burning behind a ground glass window, and for every reason he felt it more reassuring to address his face doggedly in that direction than towards the glooms which lay behind his back. It was gratifying to know that his resolution, a puissant force impelling it, had conquered those glooms, and to practical effect; still, the point gained, there seemed no present reason for presuming on the providence which had so far favoured him. He preferred to wait, facing the light, near the fringe of the wood for the appointment which had brought him there.

But, as the hour struck and passed, some nervous irritation would affect him. He was strung to the adventure, but he wanted it grappled and done with. Why did she not come? All girls and women seemed to regard time as a jest. It had been the same with Mrs Angell: he had never known her once in all his life punctual to an engagement.

At last, a quarter of an hour late, she appeared. He heard the soft patter of Gritty's hoofs on the turf outside, and the pair drew into sight. Even seen so, her figure dusk against the light, his mistress brought to Brion's heart the thrill of delighted surprise she for

ever conveyed. He never saw her afresh but she seemed a new thing to him, lovelier and more winsome than when last encountered. And now she was new in fact, at least as regarded her habit. Like the young spirit of the Spring she came to him all in tender green, an orchard sweetness in her face, and her eyes were the first speedwells of the year. A hood fell loosely back from her fair head, as its sheath slips from a blossom, and her feet gave life to the barren carpet of dead leaves, greening it where they fell. So she came to him, moving with the unhurried gladness that was her way, and he had a hard ado to temper his welcome with even the show of severity her lateness called for. He had not, for precaution's sake, gone to meet her, but had waited while she tethered the little ass to a branch on the outskirts of the grove; and now he stood erect, as she greeted him in her soft voice, and with half eager, half fearful eyes :—

'Have you in truth found a way, Brion?'

'Mayhap a way,' he answered, 'if we are left to take it. The sun will be through in a little, enough to reveal our meeting should any chance to be looking.'

Struck by something in his tone, and perhaps by his apparent failure to observe her half proffered hands, she moved a little back, her lips parted, her eyes full of a questioning wonder.

'Was this mist, then, of thy bespeaking,' she said, 'and engaged to us up to a certain hour? You speak as if I should have remembered that.'

'I speak like one keeping an appointment,' he answered.

She searched his face for humour, but discovered none.

'Brion,' she said suddenly, 'am I late to our tryst?'

'A man might consider so,' he replied stiffly.

'But only by a few minutes?'

'Say fifteen, Mistress—nothing to a lady that holds the terrors of this wood at naught.'

Her face was lifted to his. The dimples threatened a moment, but she controlled them.

'I had not thought of that. It must have been dreadful for you waiting here alone.'

'You do not think so, I can see.'

'Brion, don't be cross with me.'

Her tone, her attitude were so sweet and coaxing, he could resist no longer. He put his hands on her shoulders.

'You want to laugh, Joan. Well, laugh, a'God's name, since it is like birds in sunlight to see and hear you.'

'Well, I will not, lest it hurt you.'

'Why, thou art laughing now. Has this place, indeed, no fears for you?'

'Why should it? I have done no evil in it.'

'That is true, Joan, and a truth that shames me. Conscience should fear no spectres but its own. What made you late?'

'Nothing but the mist itself: I must needs pick my way at first. So, if the mist was part of your plan and procuring, you are the one to blame.'

'Well, you are here—and like Chloris in a green kirtle. I love you in it.'

'Alack! and when it is wore out you will love me no more.'

'Then it shall last you a lifetime.'

'God advise me, if I am to choose between that and

your love. But my comfort is after a year or two you would learn to hate me in it.'

'To hate you, Joan! You can find comfort in that?'

'Nay, comfort in a new gown. Yet it glads me that it likes you, dear my lord. I will wear green to my wedding and green till my bedding under the green turf. It was to make myself inconspicious against the green grass that I put it on. Yet there is no grass in here, Brion.'

'No, by my faith. You speak "conspiciously" well. We are not so deep in but we may be seen. How merry you are.'

'Am I? Mayhap it is to hide something.'

'What! Are you growing afraid?'

'Afraid? By my troth, no. If you could hear my conscience singing! It is a carol all quavers.'

'Come, then, while I show you.' He put an arm unresisted, about her, and they turned to the dark essay. ''Tis by here, the way,' he whispered—'the only one for secrecy. But I doubt you will dare it when you see.'

She leaned close to him, not answering. For all her professed assurance, the influence of the place was beginning to tell upon her a little. As they pushed deeper into the thicket, the light saddened and grew obscure, and an intense silence gathered about them; the snaky branches seemed to writhe, involving their path in noiseless folds, and a smell of poisonous water came to their nostrils.

'It is a horrible place,' whispered the girl suddenly; and she stopped.

'You are frightened, Joan. We will go back.'

'No. Give me one moment. Look, is that the moat, and the body of a great serpent stretching across it?'

'It is the moat; but the serpent is only a limb of that big tree before us, sleek and mottled like a green worm. It bridges the ditch and rests upon the wall beyond; and it is over that we must go, if go we must.

'How did you discover it, Brion—this way, I mean?'

'Why, I came to look. I had promised you I would contrive a plan; and here was my contrivance, all ready provided for us. I take no credit for it.'

'Nay, but you shall have it, since it was credit enough to seek into these glooms you feared.' And you dared it just for my idle word, Brion?'

'I should be no true knight, Joan, if I refused to descend into the very pit for my lady's sake.'

He looked, smiling, down on her, and she up at him. Some sense of an indefinable pressure, of a helpless entreaty caught at his heart with a shock. And the next moment he had bent his head lower, and kissed her lips.

The instant he had done so, the awful rapture of that profanation smote him scarlet. He thought he must have alienated her beyond forgiveness.

'O, Joan!' he said—'I was mad.'

She broke from him, he supposed to leave the copse and his presence without another word. But, to his wonder and relief, she seemed as if unconscious of the offence. Only, had it been light, he might have seen how the rose of pudency had flushed suddenly to the very nape of her neck.

'Come,' she said, in a voice that was hardly audible.

He could scarce believe his ears; but his every vein was throbbing with the ecstasy of a new revelation.

He followed her, and in a moment they came down to the big tree, and stood together by the side of the moat.

The tree was like a monstrous devil-fish, throwing out a swarm of tentacles, smooth and sinuous, which were heavily interlaced with others projected from the farther bank, so that altogether they formed with their sombre foliage a dense dark canopy shrouding in the black water. Of these tentacles, one, the biggest, reared itself across the moat and over the wall beyond, on which it rested, forming a sloping bridge, with at least a reasonable foothold for a passenger supporting himself by certain minor branches which could be used as handrails. It was a quite feasible way, though uninviting, and the boy waited for his companion's verdict on it.

'Well?' he whispered presently.

She had been silent, because it was her own voice she feared after that conscious contact; but now she rallied her self-possession.

'I am going across, Brion. Where is the well-house?'

'Cannot you see it—there, among the trees? It is only its back, of course; but the leaves so hide it, it might be part of the wall. To reach the front we shall have to cross by this, and drop down on the other side. It is really quite easy, if you are not afraid.'

'I am going over.'

'You mean it, Joan?'

She laughed, as they had been talking, low and thrillingly, and the next moment was on the branch.

'Wait, while I stand by you,' he said, all a'quiver. 'Hold firm, Joan. God a' mercy, if you should slip and fall into the foul slime!'

She laughed again: that was a practical contingency, with nothing supernatural about it, and the fear of it helped her to steadiness. But they won across easily enough; and, as to Brion, he took the branch like a squirrel, and, once over the wall, jumped down and held up his arms to help his lady alight. And in another moment they stood together, hand in hand, before the open portal of the well-house.

'Joan! You are not going in?'

'Why not?'

'Does it not make your marrow crawl? I would I had your courage.'

'Brion, I will tell you the truth. It is not courage but curiosity. I think for that a woman would dare to call up the devil. Is it there, indeed, where the poor pitiful maid was cast?'

'So old Harlock says.'

'It may not be true. What was that?'

'O, Joan, in God's name, come away! Did you hear it? It was the horrible laugh again.'

'Well, I am going to look.'

He clutched at her, but she eluded him, and, slipping into the chamber, bent over the well-rim.

'Joan! What are you doing? Are you quite mad?'

'Come and look down, Brion. You can see the water, miles below, like a little dim moon.'

He stood behind her, having put that force upon himself; but he sweated with apprehension. Suddenly she stooped, picked up a fragment of broken stone from the floor, and, before he could stop her, dropped it down the well. There was an interval of silence, and then a distant plop, followed once more by an exacerbated chuckling. And then, as Brion's hair

seemed to rise on his head, the girl turned on him, merrily clapping her hands.

'Didn't it gobble like a turkey! I know now what it is: it is the water clucking in some deep-down vent connected with the moat. I saw the bubbles rising when we crossed the tree.'

Was that, indeed, the wonderful explanation? Brion felt as if a flood of sunlight had suddenly broken into the chamber, softening and diluting its terror.

'Joan!' he cried amazedly, a spring of damp on his forehead. 'Is it so, in good sooth? I believe you may be right; I believe——'

He was interrupted by his companion:—

'O, look at that great wheel on the wall! There is just such another in the royal Castle of Carisbrook, where once I was taken. Do you know what it is for, Brion?'

'Do you, Joan?'

'To be sure I do. It is to wind up the bucket from the well. They put a donkey inside, and he walks and turns the wheel. Only the rope is gone from this, but not the pulley. There it is, up in the roof above our heads.'

It was there, true enough. The engine of mysterious torture was resolved into a homely vehicle for an ass's plodding. This practical little mind had dispelled at a word the last glooms of the terrific place.

They went to examine the wheel together. It hung upon the wall like a huge clock which had lost its hands. Its lowest segment was sunk a foot below the pavement in an oblong hole cut to accommodate it. The sun had by now broken through the mist, and a melancholy light filtered down through the trees into the stone chamber. The great cylinder was still sound in balance and structure, and they got into it, and, working it

like mice in a revolving cage, made it move. It turned slowly, groaning and sighing to be so awakened from its long slumber, but it did turn, and the easier as they continued. Presently Brion started, with a 'Hush!'

'The well again?' whispered his companion.

'No. Methought I heard a footstep in the garden outside. Supposing old Harlock were to come in and find us?'

'We must not be found. If my father were to hear of our meetings!'

'Keep still. Do not move the wheel again for your life. Now! Step out without a sound. We must go back the way we came, and you must ride off, while I lie hid in the wood.'

They moved like cats. There was no difficulty about regaining the branch from the banked-up ground against the wall, and in a minute they were across, and had slipped into the covert of the trees on the farther side. And there they stood to part.

'Fare thee well, dear Brion.'

'Is that all, dear Joan?'

'Why, what can I have more to say but to thank thee?'

'Thanks are for lips; yet the sweetest are without words. For what thou hast taught me I owe thee a thousand kisses.'

'Nay, the saving grace of an error is in the teaching one not to repeat it. If I know my peril, and avoid it, will you, who love me, lead me into it again? That is not to be my knight.'

'Dear Joan, forgive me.'

'Yes, Brion.'

They parted, with a sweet gravity. Were they not lovely serious, the pretty things, and did they not deserve the best a kind Fate could allot them?

CHAPTER XII

IL PENSEROSO

ONCE more the two sat together in the high bower overlooking the glen. No churlish weather had, in all the short course of their idyll, marred its perfection, and still the sun shone and the air breathed honied upon their happy meetings. But on this occasion the girl was pensive and quiet as Brion had never known her to be before, and for some reason the fact disturbed him. She was never anything but physically tranquil —a pretty pacific creature whose graces were all on the side of soft rounded ease and caressing movements; yet her young brain lacked nothing in bright activity, and it was her present failure to respond in kind to his livelier mood which filled the boy with an inexplicable feeling like foreboding. He was made so uneasy at last by her unresponsiveness that he was driven to rally her upon it :—

'What ails you, Joan, that you are so silent?'

She did not answer for a moment, but sat looking down sidelong, idly plucking at the blades of grass.

'Joan?' he persisted.

She just raised her lids in a swift glance at him, then drooped them again, and a flush came to her cheek.

'We have been good friends, have we not, Brion?' she said, her face still half averted from him.

'Have been, Joan! Why not are, and will be?'

Her fingers grew busier at their plucking.

'How can I tell? Maids must come to marry.'

He started and sat quite rigid, as if some paralysing thing had stung him. His lips repeated the word mechancially, as he stared before him :—

'To marry?'

'It is the common lot, you know,' she murmured.

He made a desperate effort to steady his wits and his voice.

'But you are so young.'

She gave a great sigh : 'Heigho ! it is age that lacks suitors.'

'You have a suitor, Joan?'

'My father says so.'

'And you?'

'What is there for me to say?'

He turned on her with a sudden violence. A heat had sprung to his face. 'And you never told me? Is this to be the end between us, then?'

Her hand at the grass was busier than ever.

'That is not for me to answer.'

'For whom is it?' he cried. And his passion went out of him, and he spoke in sad measured tones : 'I had not once dreamed of this; I had lived in our friendship, seeing no end to it. You don't know what you have been to me, Joan. Well, here is the end. I might have foreseen it but for my blind folly. How could I dream for one moment that the daughter of the rich City knight would take aught but a passing interest in this young portionless neighbour of hers. It should be my full content to know that she hath deigned to use me to kill some idle hours. God be with you, Mistress Medley'—and he jumped to his feet.

'Brion,' said the girl, 'you are very cruel. And you

may sneer in your pride at my father for his riches; but it is they bestow power and authority. What he bids me do I must do, since he may command the life he gave me; yet, despite your wounding words, I would rather die than do that bidding of his which made me false to you.'

She turned away, as he stared at her; but there was a sign of that in her eyes which he had never seen there yet, and which went to his very heart. Impulsively he flung himself on his knees beside her, and put an arm about her shoulders.

'No, you are cruel,' she said, resisting him.

But he would not be denied. 'Dear Joan; I love you so. Think what it must have meant to me to hear you. Tell me only one thing. I will not ask you who it is. I know naught about your private matters, nor, by my troth, seek to know. This privacy of ours is passing sweet, and it is enough for me. But one thing only: tell me you do not favour this same suitor.'

She was easily coaxed. She had no real will to repel him, but allowed herself to be drawn back into his arms, where he won a lovely smile from wet eyes.

'Become *his* wife!' she said, with a little catch in her breath, 'I would liefer be a wild man's squawk.'

Brion did not respond: for all his tragic mood, an irresistible spasm seized him.

'What is the matter?' she asked, surprised. 'Are you laughing?'

He shook all through as he held her; and suddenly he gasped.

'O, God a' mercy, Joan—that word! Where did you learn it?'

'From a Mr Richard Grenville, a Border Captain,

that lay once at the Chase. He spake much of savage lands across the seas, and of those that inhabit there. The wives are so called, Brion: i'faith I know they are.'

'O! Very well, if you know.'

'He told, too, of many strange things he had seen, both men and beasts; amongst others of a bird called a pelican that hath seventeen stomachs, and will feed its young, when they are starving, on its own hump.'

'Hump! A bird with a hump!'

'It is true, Brion; really it is.'

'I am sure it is, Joan; and I call that an unlucky bird; for methinks it might seldom happen that all the seventeen were in one agreement, unless for pain. But let that pass; and, as to the wives, why I say you shall be no wild man's squawk, though I have to marry you myself.'

'Will you marry me, Brion?'

'O, Joan, you are an artless darling! What shall I say; what can I do!' He clutched at his young forehead. 'I may not ask: my tongue is tied: I will not know; yet, not knowing, how can I answer? "Maids must come to marry," quotha! But whom, whom? Not a wild man's loathed alternative? Whom did you mean, Joan? And must it be he or death? Ah, that we two were of an age to wed!'

'Well, I will wait for you, an you ask me.'

'Will you wait? Will you dare? May he not force you?'

'He will not—no, never. I will throw myself from the *Lover's Leap* first.'

This was a great sheer crag on the Buckland side of Holne Chase, and known by name and sight to Brion.

'Will you, Joan?' he said. The threat was wild and

tragic, yet he could not associate this loveling, so gentle-soft, with such a deed. Nor could she herself, it seemed, in grim earnest; for she added :—

'But he will not force me—his way is colder. It will be, at the worst, "Take him, or never see my face again. I parley with no wilful child." Then, an he drive me from his door, I will come to you.'

'He could not be so base! The hard oak would refuse to close upon you; the skies would weep a flood to cast you back.'

The girl laughed, a little tearfully; and Brion laughed ruefully in response.

'Well,' he said, 'he is your father, and, such as he appears, no figure of my conjuring. I have asked no questions of you, Joan, have I?'

'No, Brion.'

'Nor must, of that other, that villain suitor, I suppose?'

'Nay, do not, I prithee. It were my shame to clepe him.'

The boy sighed :—

'Well, we are together yet!' And so for long time they sat in silence, their arms linked about one another, innocence in their caresses, since a common emotion had broken down the last reserves between them. Presently Joan spoke :—

'You will always be my true knight, Brion?'

'On my soul, Joan.'

'Then, whatever may part us now, we shall keep one in love and faith?'

'Why do you talk of parting? You are not going to leave me?'

'Alack! the end comes always—even to summer days.

I have heard talk of London; but I know not—only fear. Brion, will you never forget me?'

'I live only for you, Joan, and ever shall. Your very name is music to my ears.'

She bent her head down, not answering for awhile.

'Would you—would you love me even as now, if——'

'If what?'

'If you came to find me in some sort other than the blameless maid of your fancy?'

'To be blameless is, methinks, to be insipid. I do not want you blameless, Joan, but only to be my loving dear.'

'I shall always be that, Brion, if I live to a hundred.'

They were loath to part; but clung to one another and to these last moments, as if in some indefinite way they felt in them the running out of the golden sands. But the end had to come, and when at last they rose, each to go its road, in a passionate impulse the boy flung his arms about his comrade's neck, and set his lips to hers in a long kiss which this time she made no effort to resist or to withdraw from.

Alas, how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

'Farewell, dear Joan—till to-morrow!'

'Till to-morrow, dear Brion!'

It sounded in his ears like an empty echo.

CHAPTER XIII

DESOLATION

O, the mist and the weeping rain! They were there in good earnest when Brion opened his eyes the next morning to a disenchanted world. In the night great sea fogs had trooped in from the south-west, and sponged out the landscape as a fresco might be blotted from a wall, leaving only faint indications here and there of the original design. It was drearily ominous of change, of the effacing of halcyon days, and of the blankness which follows Youth's first realisation that it is not immune from the common heritage of loss and sorrow. Sad is loneliness, but sadder still the loneliness which bright company has found and forsaken. There was a time before the boy which, in moods and spasms, he was to feel almost unendurable.

He did not, of course, wake at once to any desolate conviction of an end; but, while something faintly premonitory of it whispered in his heart, rose and went about his business, pretending to himself a confidence he did not really feel. Hope was not dead because the weather was bad. He had a tryst to keep, and keep it he would, though the heavens fell.

Yet he did not keep it—and for the sufficient reason that he could not. He had had no experience so far of a Dartmoor mist, nor guessed the nature of its baffling density. A very little venturing, however, was enough to convince him that he had no more chance of

winning to the bower in that sodden blinding cloud than he had of finding his mistress, unless by some miracle, awaiting him there. And to that conclusion Phineas, who had discovered him on the point of issuing forth, helped him.

'Whither away, an it please you?' said he, his brows lifted.

'To the moors,' answered Brion.

'And to your death on them, mayhap,' said the cook. 'Dost know what thou venturest? Be warned, young master.'

'What death?' said the boy scornfully.

'The death of rocks and water, of falls and blind wanderings, of cold and exhaustion. Thou must not go, indeed.'

'Must not, master cook! That is no word for me. Now, stand aside, I prithee.'

'What shall I say to his honour, when he comes to call my account?'

'Say that you did your best, but could not prevail with a proud and wilful boy. I prithee, good Phineas.'

'Now, God help both me and you! Will you do it?'

Brion pushed by, with no answer other than a laugh, and ran out into the mist. He found, with some difficulty, the wicket in the big outer gate, opened it, stepped through, and passed over the bridge. And the fog swallowed him.

An hour later he came back. Phineas heard and ran out, to find him sitting, white and dripping, in the hall. He threw up his arms, with a great sigh of joy and relief:—

'*Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro!*'

'That is Church Latin,' said Brion weakly.

The other hung his head.

'Old habits will cling. 'Tis all one for the language of the heart.'

'Well, you were right, Phineas, and I was wrong. I was lost as soon as started. Only good chance brought me presently back to the gate, and to the near fracture of my skull against it. In the interval I have followed spectres, I have had falls, I have soaked in water enough that if you wrung me in the moat it would overflow. I prithee give me something hot before I perish.'

'Now, get you, if you can, rid of your clothes and into dry duds. I will bring you up with my own hands a stoup of broth and such mulled sack as shall persuade you half way into a tippler'—and he hurried off to his task, grunting relief and jubilance by the way. He was very much concerned, was Phineas—not only over this last piece of obstinacy, but over certain wayward moods which had preceded it. It had been patent to all the small household, and particularly to him through his profession, that matters had not been latterly as they should be with the boy. To put it as a case, Brion had eaten well when he was most repining, and ill when he was most elated, which, gastronomically, was all wrong. After Clerivault's going, he had been sad with a glad appetite, and, later, glad with a bad appetite. What was the reason, and why had he, who for so long had hung disconsolate about the house, suddenly taken to being hardly ever at home? There must *be* a reason, and cogitating it, the wise cook shook his head. There seemed to him only one plausible explanation of the phenomenon—an intrigue with some moorland pottlepot.

Well, such eventualities had to be counted on, and,

if it was the case, he could do nothing. But it should have restored all his theories of fitness, when, as came shortly to occur, Brion fell definitely into a state of being sad with a bad appetite.

Now, the damning mist and drizzle lasted for three days; and what the boy suffered in that time only his own passionate prematurity could tell. It was not simply that he was temporarily shut off, fettered and helpless, from his earthly paradise, but that he was tortured with anxiety as to what might be happening behind the veil. Then that sense of dark premonition would reassert itself, and paint the future for him in blackest colours. What if he were to find their worst apprehensions realised, and Joan torn from him in the very moment of their perfect understanding? No, Fate could not be so cruel!

But Fate was just so cruel, and a little more, since that was exactly what had happened. On the very day following that of the last meeting in the bower Sir John Medley had saddled up and departed for London, taking the whole of his household with him. Brion heard the news from William as a mere piece of local gossip, and bore it unflinching.

'And Mars Phineas says as they du say,' added William, 'that Sir John he be a-leaving the Chase for good, and not intending to come back to it never again no more.'

So the worst was not the worst, after all, and the tragedy not so complete but that Fate must provide an anticlimax to it. She was gone from him, and that was not enough: she must be lost to him for ever and ever. Any miserable hope he might have entertained of another season renewing the rapture of this must be

forgone and stoically renounced. The end of all things had come.

He thought so, indeed, poor lad, and wisdom shall have no smile for his delusion. If this was, after all, but a boy and girl romance, to magnify the importance of which were to misuse one's sense of proportion, it was a thing as intensely felt, and far more purely, than many an older passion. His life, his loneliness, his own reserved temperament had made of Brion a boy with something of a man's heart, and it was as a man rather than as a boy he suffered.

But it was as a boy that, when at last the bitter delayed sun made his appearance through the clouds, he climbed to the empty bower, and wept and wept childish tears to know his sweet love gone from it. What would be her fate, so ravished beyond the reach of his influence, besieged and persecuted, perhaps, to force her into compliance with an unnatural demand? How he hated that unknown suitor; how he despised and scorned the commercial-souled parent who could stoop to barter his own flesh and blood (for to that unwarrantable conclusion he had jumped) against some worldly consideration. In alternations of mood he would sorrow dumbly, or burst into wild imprecations over the inhuman destiny which had uplifted him only to cast him down. At first, in spite of a fact stated and verified, he would cherish some mad hope that the family had not really departed—at least that *she* had been left behind, and that he would go to the bower one day and find her awaiting him with shining eyes and soft enamoured looks. But that dream was of brief duration: it could not survive the testimony of witnesses who knew the truth and could have no

object in distorting it. And so, reconvinced of its emptiness, he would to his ravings again.

Well, the tumultuous time passed, and was succeeded in due course by a sad and settled resignation. The habit of sorrow comes, like other habits, to fit the more easily the longer it is worn. There was reached a day of half sweet, half melancholy reveries, when past joys began to assume an air of dim peacefulness, more of regret than of anguish. Old looks, old tones took on a mystic glamour, like happy things remembered from a dream. Most of all, queerly enough, there lingered in the boy's mind a thought, humorously pathetic, of those quaint misterms which had issued so funnily from the girl's lips. He put them down, young learned clerk that he was, to a faulty education; but he would not have his memory of his Joan without them. They seemed an essential part of the sweet thing she was.

And so, for what she had been and remained, he locked his dream away in his breast, only to be taken out and sorrowed over in rare relapses on emotion, but otherwise quietly possessed as a gift of ancient beauty. Always it abode with him, and was not the less there because other interests and desires, fruit of his growing life, appeared to absorb him. But he never forgot his early love, or forgot that he had dedicated his service, true knight and champion, to her honour and renown. That consciousness, though it ceased in time to be insistent, kept him brave and pure.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EMOTION AND A DISCOVERY

It happened timely that there arrived from London at this pass that great consignment of goods and furniture before referred to. The unloading and distribution of the stuff, for all the boy's professed repudiation of any interest in it, came presently, however, irresistibly to engage his curiosity, and he won a certain wintry distraction from his own thoughts by directing the placing of the multifarious items in the spots most fancied by his sense of fitness or caprice. He showed a good deal of captiousness in the matter, being in no mood to consider other people's feelings when his own had been so rasped and wounded; but his obedient henchmen, influenced, perhaps—at least in the Cook's case—by their sympathy with something loosely approximating the truth, submitted meekly to his tyranny, and lugged heavy objects at his bidding into all sorts of inconvenient nooks and eyries. And, not until every piece was disposed to their young despot's liking, were they permitted to relax their efforts and conclude their task fulfilled; when he thanked and praised them so sweetly, with a hint of remorse for his own inconsiderateness, that they forgave him offhand, and withdrew luminously to submit their bruised thumbs and abraded fingers to the ministrations of Mrs Harlock.

Brion wondered, and without any great excitement,

if this arrival might portend the return of his Uncle and Clerivault to the Grange. He did not seem to care much, one way or the other; but certainly the practical business of thus preparing for them was useful in keeping his mind occupied with something other than its own unhappiness. Especially was he pleased with the books —of which there was a considerable number—and with the promise they held out to him of a temporary forgetfulness in their absorption. He took much time and thought over their classification and shelving, and was gratified to discover amongst them some old friends, together with others he had heard of whose acquaintance he was interested to make. For he had always been a reader, appreciative and discriminative above his years, and in that respect owed to his good old preceptor, who had done much to direct his tastes.

Now amongst the volumes familiar to him through knowledge or repute he counted to his satisfaction the following items :—

A Christian exhortacion unto customable swearers : by Miles Coverdale (A more or less recent tract whose title tickled him).

Cooper's Chronicle, of the Kings' Successions, 'wyth divers profitable Histories' (Also recent, as brought up to date to the seventh year of the Queen's Majesty's reign).

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, with the Caxton imprint.

Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (done into English by Robynson, with the date 1551, though, if in the original Latin, it had possessed small difficulties for him).

The Bayte and Snare of Fortune: by Roger Bieston (a highly moral discourse, ' treated in a Dialogue betwene man and money,' and printed 'At the signe of the Sunne over against the conduite in Fletestrete').

The obedyence of a Chrysten Man: by William Tyndale, translator of the Bible—

And some others. There were also a good many books, contentious or expository, on Romish theology, and quite a number of illuminated Vulgates, Psalters, Passionales, Lectionariums, Graduals, Breviaries and Books of Hours, most of which were of extreme value and beauty. All these gave him great satisfaction in prospect, as, with one possible exception, they most certainly would not do to a Brion of to-day; but the small reading of 1574, excluding such levities as the *Decamerone* and the impossible extravagances of Sir John Mandeville, to be seemly had to be dull. Even the unprecedented Knight of la Mancha had not yet stalked into print; and Gulliver and Robinson Crusoe were decades away.

The boy was browsing one afternoon among these illuminated volumes, enjoying the beauty of their convoluted designs and brilliantly-pictured legends, when he saw something which sent the blood back upon his heart in a curious little shock. He had taken down a Book of Hours, *Horae Beatae Virginis Mariae ad Usum Romanum, cum Calendario*—a fair little volume in Roman letter with splendid wood-cuts—when, in turning over the leaves he discovered a name upon the title page—*Jane Middleton Baggott: her booke:* 1554: *at Gray's Inne.*

He was squatting on the floor. Gently he put the little volume down in his lap, and turned his head to gaze out of the great west window, which looked into the Court. It was very still; a light brooding mist filled the air; there were swallows skimming and diving under the eaves. But he saw nothing material: only

the softness and quietude of things seemed consonant with the wistful abstraction his eyes expressed.

'One sister; but she died.' Clerivault's unwilling words came back to his mind—and again others spoken by his Uncle, when he had taken his face between his hands and read some likeness there. Jane Middleton —had that been her name; and was it the memory of that dead sister which had seemed to move the brother so deeply when gazing into his eyes? Middleton! and he himself was so called—why? A queer unforgotten word once uttered by his lost love recurred to him—not for the first time. Was here the clue to the long riddle? Some shadowy suspicion of the truth had already flitted through his soul—from ages ago—from the day when the pale pretty lady had stopped her horse to speak to him. He felt again her kiss upon his baby lips; he felt——

Suddenly his eyes were hot with tears: they had come unexpected, from out of nowhere, and had taken him by surprise. He sat very still, battling with his emotion; and in a little he had quite mastered it. Then he took up the Book of Hours, and rose to return it to its place; but first, in a quick impulse, he bent and kissed the name upon the title.

'She called herself my first lover,' he whispered— 'I remember it now so well—and her pretty one, and her babe. She was sad and beautiful; and I hated him that rode with her.'

And now in thought he hated the handsome sinister cavalier more than ever—hated him with the hatred of a child's rebellion against misused authority and immitigable wrong.

All the rest of that day Brion went very quiet. He

seemed preoccupied; he was grateful for little ordinary services; almost submissive to those who rendered them. It was as if some shock to his young pride had humbled him to the dust. But his mind was restlessly busy. He had never seen his Uncle since he parted from him in the Cock tavern; he had felt some anticipatory awe over their re-meeting; now he wanted him to return, that he might face him with a direct question. He meant to put that question; whencesoever he derived it, he had an imperious spirit.

There was another associated matter, too, which gave him food for uneasy reflection, especially in the light of certain remarks once made by his girl love—and that was the Romish savour of much of the Judge's literature. Was this Uncle of his really at heart, or had been, a Papist? It was a dangerous thing to be suspect of such sympathies in these days. Yet there was that story of his disgrace, which might not be calumny, and there were these pious evidences, which might, after all, be no more than the evidences of an enthusiastic book-lover. It would seem at least that the little '*Horae Beatae*' had been personal to the devotions of Jane Middleton, for the marks of frequent use were visible on its pages. He thought of the slender fingers turning the leaves, of the wistful face bent above them, with a strange indulgent feeling that was like protection. Well, she anyhow was dead, and beyond the reach of persecution. He felt the tears very near his eyes again.

So the books had taught him something which he had never looked to find in them. They could not, alas! teach him how to forget, but rather, through this discovery, had aggravated his memory. Was it to be his

fate always to be forsaken of his womankind? For a time again the anguish of his recent loss drove him to desperation. He wandered incessantly abroad, visiting, with melancholy iteration, every spot connected with his lost love's presence—the glen, the copse, the old well-house. That place held no terrors for him at last. If he had felt any hesitation about re-entering it, he had savagely turned on himself for suspecting what was for ever now made lovable through her association with it. It was the sanctum where, recalling her sweetness and her endearingness, he could most let his emotions free. His own sad spirit haunted it in a way, with a force, to overbear and extinguish all lesser ghosts.

He was in there, one day, leaning against the rim of the big wheel and indulging his most twilight mood, when something occurred of a sufficient interest to afford his mind at least a temporary surcease from its dejection. He had been recalling, for the hundredth time, that unforgettable morning of the adventure, and how resolute she had been, the darling, and how clear-headed; and how her bright temerity had been innocent of all moral-pointing, when she might have despised him for his cowardice. Would the contempt come now, he thought, if she could know him for what he was? Or did she already know—or guess? There must have been some half-conscious purpose in her assurance to him, so quaintly expressed, of her indifference to the name given him by her father. Pondering it all, he fell into a fit of profound musing, from which he was suddenly startled by the sound of the well laughing.

He gave a violent start—not of panic, for he was

long familiar now with that weird throaty chuckle and its cause, but of mere nervous repercussion—and, coming erect, found himself caught at the back. Some part of his dress had hitched in a projection of the wood-work, and held him prisoner. He pulled, and the object, whatever it was, appeared to come away. Suddenly it yielded, and fell heavily at his heels. He turned to see what it was, and discovered that he had drawn out from the circumference of the wheel one of the short boards or panels of which it was composed.

For the moment, stooping to lift the thing, he imagined that its detachment was due to mere accident or decay; but suddenly, as he idly handled it, his fingers touched on something which set him oddly thinking. This was a notch or groove on the *underside* of the board—representing the *outside* of the wheel—which had been intentionally cut there, it would seem, to facilitate its removal. But for what purpose? A little excited, he made a quick examination of the gap exposed, and saw at once that chance had led him on a curious discovery. The board, a stout one, some eighteen inches in width, was furnished with a tongue on each side, the two being formed to slide into corresponding grooves cut in the adjacent sections, in the manner of a 'match-joint,' and it was fitted on its outer edge, like a box-lid, with a flange which, when the panel was pushed home, came up flush with the wheel-rim. Brion tried it in and out, and found that it ran quite easily. But why was it there, and what was the meaning of the notch?

Now the lowest segment of the wheel, as already said, turned, for a foot or more below the surface, in a little oblong pit cut to receive it in the pavement, as if some

miscalculation of the diameter had necessitated that stratagem. Brion had always so looked upon it as a makeshift, but now he began to wonder. After a minute of thrilling reflection, he slid out the panel, laid it aside, and, turning the wheel until the gap in it came over the pit, steadied the slowly rotating monster and looked down. And instantly, with a little shock of the blood, he understood. The pit was no shallow depression made to receive the wheel, but the entrance to an underground chamber of unknown depth and significance.

For some moments he leaned over, staring, his heart going like an excited bird's. In that dim and melancholy twilight he could not make out much, but quite unmistakably the outline of rough stone steps descending. Still he did not quite understand. It was obvious now that the notch was for the use of anyone hidden below and desirous of emerging; yet the position of that sunken part of the wheel would preclude the possibility of the panel being pushed outward. How was it managed? There was nothing for it but to go down and see. Only he must have a light. He shivered with impatience: he could hardly command it to hurry away, and make for the house, and, as privately as he could, procure tinder and taper. But he did it, and got back unobserved.

The aperture left by the dislodged board was not great, yet it was more than sufficient for an ordinary person to pass. Brion descending through it, in a state far too wrought up for perturbation, easily gained the upper step; and there he crouched, to look for the first solution of the puzzle. It was simple enough, after all. There was a slot cut in the side of the pit

into which the panel could be run, and, when there, it anchored the wheel in place. The boy, elate with his discovery, came out and put the device to an immediate test. He turned the wheel, slipped in the panel, brought it over the hole, and, manipulating it from the upper side, found the slot and slid the board in. The whole thing, it seemed to him, had the virtues of extraordinary simplicity combined with absolute secrecy. Who would dream that the wheel, an engine of everyday use, covered the entrance to a subterranean hiding-place? He would never have discovered it himself but for that accident of his jerkin hooking itself on a tough splinter.

But now there faced him the deeper essay. He did not hesitate over it a moment, but, entering and descending with his light, found himself, at some three yards down, in a little stone-lined chamber excavated out of the soil. It might have measured a cubic nine feet or so, and was quite empty. Its walls were dank, there was a smell of the unopened vault about it, and that was all. There appeared to be no egress from it in any direction but up the steps. Probably it had been devised for a hiding-place in the days so far back as the Wars of the Roses, when it was convenient for all militant gentry to possess a handy burrow.

Satisfied that he had seen all that was to be seen, Brion ascended again to the light, pushed the panel into place, revolved the wheel a little so as to shuffle, as it were, the cards, and retired, rich in the possession of the second of two secrets with which that Spring had endowed him. True, there seemed small object in reserving this latest to himself; yet one never knew.

CHAPTER XV

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERERS

It was late in July when Brion, returning one noon from a visit to the Glen—where, against his better sentiments, he had found an irresistible attraction in watching the trout and grayling blowing rings in the water—was conscious, as he approached the Moated Grange, of something in its atmosphere which had not been there when he left it. A livelier smoke seemed to rise from the kitchen chimney: there were signs of hoofmarks in the dust about the bridge. With a beating heart he pushed open the wicket; there was a shout, and the next moment he was in Clerivault's arms.

'Marry come up!' cried that dear paragon. 'Is not here a gallant guerdon for my toils! Nay, hold away, while my hungry eyes make a feast of thee!'

His lids blinked; he looked gaunter, more fantastic than ever; for all his cherished grudge against him it warmed Brion's heart to hear again the high husky voice with its intermittent squeak. He had nothing to give his friend for the moment but smiles and welcome.

'Have you really come back, Clerivault,' he said—'and for good?'

'For good, sweetheart? Ay, for no harm, at least.'

A vast hulk of a man, standing at the door of the porter's lodge, laughed out like a jovial bassoon:—

'There's a rare wit for you, Master,' said he.

He was enormous, like a tree—a great lusty fellow in a buff jerkin and hip-high boots, with a falling band about his throat. Each of his ruddy cheeks might have sufficed a moderate man for his whole countenance; and his fist would have served a giant for his Sunday joint. Clerivault flicked him under the chin with his glove.

'Speak when you're spoken to, little Nol,' said he; 'and then to better effect than to point out the obvious. Lout, man, lout to your betters, nor stand there beaming like the sun in a red hazel bush.'

The huge creature ducked to Brion, who responded by holding out his hand.

'Is this Nol porter?' he said, with a smile. 'On my troth, a fit attendant on a Judge of Assize!'

The giant, grasping the slim hand abashed, gaped doubtful a moment, then went into a second boom of laughter. Here was another quip patent to his perceptives. It was to be his rare fortune, it seemed, to serve under a second wit, matching Clerivault's own.

That gentleman interposed, a little starchily. He was jealous for the boy's sole attention.

'A Judge,' said he, 'is not needed in a matter beyond dispute. This creature's hugeness hits the eye like a battering-ram. He hath evidenced, and may be dismissed. Hence, porter—ha! and ruminate, like a vast ox, on the condescension shown thee.'

He led Brion away, while the other backed, bobbing and grinning, into the lodge. 'Now,' said he, stopping once more to look admiringly in the boy's face, 'let me gaze on thee my fill. Art grown, I swear, and to an aspect something graver than thy wont. Hast taken sadness in this interval to be thy housemate?'

'Is it cheering, think you,' said Brion, levelling his voice, 'to have cherished a friend, and to have been forsaken by him without a word?'

The other did not answer for a moment.

'Nay,' he said softly, 'I left a message for thee to be of good heart, and to keep a corner in it for me. An William gave it thee not, I will break his head for him.'

'Spare thy bluster. Hurt to another would not mend mine. Besides he gave me thy message.'

'What then, sweetling? I had to go.'

'And I to be deserted.'

'The occasion was peremptory. No choice was left to me.'

'Save to wake me and say good-bye.'

'O!' cried Clerivault, apostrophising Fate in a voice of grief and despair: 'what coil is this! *I* wake thee to that message! If I have sinned, I have sinned in good faith, and my reward is my love is rejected.'

'I said not that,' said Brion, relenting. 'But, indeed, Clerivault, it wounded me to the heart to find you gone.'

'Did it? did it?' cried the other, in a rapture of emotion. 'Then happy, happy Harlequin for all his racking! If thou but knewest, my blessed one—if thou but knewest, thou wouldst sure forgive me. But the peril—if peril it was—is laid at last, and henceforth, by God's countenance, we shall live together in security, and never more be disparted. When we rode away that night——'

'Nay,' said the boy, stopping him, a flush on his face—'whither or on what urgency I will not know. If I might not hear the exordium, I will not hear the

peroration. We were separated and we have rejoined, like the sides of a wound. That should be enough for us. The interval of pain it is well to forget, as if it had never been. I prithee speak no word of it more. Is my Uncle returned with you?'

'He is within,' answered Clerivault. He was comforted but perplexed. There was some change apparent here which he could not quite unriddle. It was like a new birth, a detachment, as when a clinging tuber has separated itself from its parent stock and declared for an independent existence. There was a pride in it of conscious power; the old sweet pliancy might be there, but its backbone had strengthened. Was he become a man indeed in this short space? It would almost seem so. There was a shadow on his lip; a knowledge, even a sadness, in his eyes which had not been there before. Whence and how had they come? The thought which had been Phineas's thought just crossed his mind. Well, he did not know whether to be glad or sorry for this development; only thank God they were together again, and reconciled, and friends as of old.

'I will go to him,' said Brion, and they walked on and entered the house. The Justice was in his private closet off the hall—a room selected for his use by Clerivault before his departure. It was a small oak-panelled chamber, sombre but comfortable. The one diamond-paned window, jewelled in its upper lights with heraldic devices, threw a pattern like trellised moonshine on the carpet of blue cloth—the only one in the house. An escritoire had been set there by Brion's directions, and the smaller bookcase, into which he had gathered the best of the illuminated missals. They

knocked, and being bid to enter, Brion saw his Uncle again.

He was seated by a table, on which stood a jug of sack and a silver tankard from which he had drunk copiously. He was just come off the road, and was soiled and weary. Yet there was that in his expression somehow more significant of mental than of physical exhaustion. The dark moody features seemed bitten with a deeper consciousness of their own fall from grace and beauty; into the large congested eyes had grown a hunted listening look, pathetic in its implication of strength harried and demoralised. His hands were tremulous when the boy came in: it had needed but that little unexpected sound upon the door to unnerve and shake him. But he greeted his nephew kindly, and with a light come into his face which shone straight into Brion's heart. He beckoned, with a smile, to the boy, and, when he came, stood him between his knees, and asked him many questions—as to his life since they had parted, and the way he had employed his time, and his opinion—a little wistfully this—as to the house and its surroundings and his feelings regarding them.

'I shall be happy now you have come,' was the brave answer.

He seemed much affected. 'What! You love me still?' said he.

'Yes, indeed, Sir.'

'That's well and good. Methinks, child, I could not do without your love.'

'Will you live here always now, Uncle Quentin?'

'Ay, so they will leave me in peace.'

He said it wearily, his brow glooming a moment. But the shadow passed, and he smiled again. 'You

ask no question,' he said; 'and that's discreet. Now, tell me: have you kept the trust I erst warned you? I have not forgotten, you see.'

'I have kept it on my honour.'

'Well said. I like your honour as I like your face. I have been in hiding, Brion. Are you curious to know why?'

'No, Sir.'

'Then, when you ask me, I shall tell you.'

'I shall not ask you.'

'Think, boy; to love me is to share my burden.'

'I will take it all, Uncle, if you will, not seeking to know its nature.'

The other did not answer for a little; but he heaved a great sigh, gazing enrapt into his young kinsman's face. Presently he said:—

'Ay, sweet; this is love. Let it rest untaxed. It is enough to know such confidence in store for me against a day when to bear my burden longer alone were perchance to see me sink under it. So, you will be happy? It is a brave and fair country, is it not? and, for the house, Nol and our laughter shall mend its glooms. I lived here once, Brion.'

'So Clerivault told me, Sir.'

'He is a gossip, that. Dost love him too?'

'I love him much, Uncle.'

'A little mad, though—eh?'

'I think a little madness spices life.'

The other laughed.

'Heart! so it may. Well, he shall be answerable for thine outward parts; act Chiron to thy Diomed; exercise thy limbs in sport and chase and make a skilful swordsman of thee. For thine inner, I must account;

rub up my Greek and Latin; look to thine education. Wilt thou be a creditable pupil?'

'I will be a willing one.'

'That's sure. I see a life before us of full content—a happy round of simple toils and sober pleasures, asking no more than health and a quiet mind. What is vext Fortune but a gilded sore? A curse on the lust for riches, which, like the fairy gold, turn to ashes in the hands of him that grasps them with a covetous heart. I am gratefuller being poor and lowly. Dost thou hear, child? I am poor at last. Will it turn thee from me?'

For answer—for his heart was full—Brion made but a caressing gesture. But it was enough.

'God bless thee,' said his kinsman in a broken voice. 'Now leave me'—and he put a hand before his eyes. But, as the boy went from the room, too awed for the moment to put the question nearest his heart, the hand was lowered to the half-emptied beaker.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRUTH AT LAST

So the parts were cast, and the new life begun in earnest. What was over was prologue; the real business of the house dated from this moment. Its members fell into their places; the weeds were gathered from the Court; the giant in short time, putting his great back into the job, brought order out of Chaos in the garden, and the whole place began to assume an aspect of more homeliness than it had shown for years. Not that on slender means it was to be reclaimed to the prosperity it had once enjoyed; it was ever in Brion's time a thin estate, a half vacant building; but at least the worst of its desolation was amended to a plausible patchwork, and the cheeriness and devotion of its denizens made up in volume for the emptiness that echoed them in unfurnished rooms.

At first the boy was restless under this transformation of surroundings which, however dreary, had been associated with some sweet times. A weight, moreover, was upon his mind, which, until he could find occasion to shift it, must still oppress and agitate him. If only he could put the question he longed to put, he would feel, he thought, whatever the nature of the answer, a more resigned harmony with his lot than ever he could attain to while that question was pending. And at length the opportunity he sought came to him, and he seized it.

Every morning he read with his uncle in the Classics —Livy's History, Isocrates' Pleadings, Cicero on Friendship and Old Age, or the Tragedies of Sophocles— showing a mind so well balanced and informed that the tutor, finding himself in danger of being surpassed by his pupil, fell more and more into the negative rôle of assenter rather than proposer, until there came a day when he withdrew unostentatiously from the partnership, leaving the boy to conduct his own education after the manner he thought best.

There was another sentiment, however, associated with this relinquishment which was neither so sagacious nor so humorous. Despondency, combined with mental inquietude and the means he took to allay them, were encouraging in Quentin Bagott at this time a habit of moody solitariness, which from an indulgence was to become an obsession, and which, in its extreme phases, only Brion could invade with impunity. The truth was that, in spite of all he had acclaimed, and wished to believe, to the contrary, an existence of pastoral seclusion and inaction, after the busy forceful life he had led, was impossible to the man, and had become only the more unendurable as his mind was gradually relieved of its apprehensions regarding a possible impeachment. A veritable *mal du pays* ensuing, he had had recourse for its alleviation to a remedy already only too familiar to him as a begetter of dreams and oblivion. Pride, too, and the bitter chagrin of a fallen power, conscious of his neighbours' knowledge of his own equivocal position, and of the means they were not slow to take to enforce that knowledge on him, helped to aggravate the double evil, and to drive him ever more upon himself and the means to forget-

fulness. He might profess to scorn, in his own self-contained strength and the devoted efficiency of his household, the 'slings and arrows' of extraneous malice: his professions could gain no confirmation from his habits. Whatever the case, however, it became soon enough patent to all about him that, of the great store of wine and strong waters had over from the *Golden Lion* in Ashburton, by far too great a proportion found its way to the ex-Judge's table or, worse, into his private closet. And the effect was not long in revealing itself, or in pointing its own miserable moral of debasement. There is tragedy in the still smouldering ruins of a house, but only squalor in them quenched and sodden.

But long before this evil had become a thing to whisper and remark on, Brion had learned all that he was destined to learn about his own history. He was with his Uncle one day, reading, at the table (to love both books and sport is to be the admirable youth) from Melancthon's *Confession*, and looking up occasionally to ask the other, who sat in his big chair by the escritoire, to expound for him some knotty passage from the gentle Reformer, when suddenly a look came into his eyes, and a thrill to his heart, with the knowledge that he had reached the way. He rose, breathing hard, his eyes shining, to his feet.

'Uncle Quentin,' he said.

'Nephew,' was the response.

'May I ask you a question—a personal one?'—he just touched the volume before him.

The heavy brows were bent upon him, suspicious, inquiring. 'What question?'

'Are you of the Reformed Church?'

'Why should you doubt it?'

'I do not. It is only the evidence of so many of your books that moiders me.'

'It befits a Judge of law, child, to hear the evidence on both sides, and it befits a judge of beauty to prize beauty above dogma. I am not so stern a convert but I can allow some virtues to the faith I have abandoned.'

'You were once a Papist, then? And was Jane Middleton a convert too?'

He had said it, and boldly, stiffening his neck; yet he might have hesitated, had he foreseen its effect upon the other. Quentin Bagott rose with a staggering motion from his chair; his features worked painfully; he stood breathing heavily, a hand to his throat.

'Uncle!' cried the boy, aghast.

'What was that you said?'

'Clerivault once told me you had a sister—but she died. Was she not called so?'

'What if she were?'

'I meant no harm. But, O, Uncle, I am sick to know! I found her name in the little Book of Hours: Jane Middleton Bagott, it was writ; and—and my name is Brion Middleton.'

He leaned forward passionately, a sobbing flutter in his throat. 'Uncle!' he cried again.

And over his own clenched hand the other bowed his head, lower, lower, and, holding it so, sank down into the chair from which he had risen. At that the boy ran and flung himself on his knees before him, pleading in a desperate voice:—

'What have I said! I never thought to hurt you so.'

The hand unclasped itself to an impatient gesture.

'Let out! You would know—what?'

The beat was going fast in the boy's throat. He struggled with himself to control it, but it yielded to an irresistible cry:—

'If she was my mother.'

A long silence followed; and then suddenly Bagott lifted his head, and looked straight and haggard into the eyes before him.

'She was thy mother,' he said.

The lad gave a little gasp; but he knelt up manly to receive the stroke he felt was threatening. The other did not alter his fixed gaze.

'Who told you?' he asked.

'No one.'

'Since when have you known—or guessed?'

'I think, in my heart, from that day when she came and kissed me on the road after the Queen had passed.' He spoke up steadily, putting force upon himself to do so.

'What made you think that she that kissed you was your mother?'

'I know not—some instinct. But the thought only grew to haunt me after years had gone, when once there returned upon me a memory of Clerivault's message, and of how, in seeming response to it, my dear master had taken me apart that day to see the Queen go by, and of what had followed. And after, when I read the name in the book, and thought of how I called you Uncle, it all seemed to piece together, so that in a moment I felt the truth of it, and wept.'

'Why should you weep?' He said it harshly, with a sneer. 'If she's dead, the nobler parent lives. Are you not curious to know about him—your father?'

'No; I hated him.'

'Hated!'

'He was an evil man. She feared him, sitting beside her. He looked at me, too, as if he hated me.'

'God!' An amazed, half startled look came into his eyes. 'Speak soft. What it is to have so quick a wit! Thy father, that—was it? Do you know, then, what you are?'

'I know what he called me.'

'What?'

'I will not speak if of myself.'

The eyes were piercing him; and then, all in a moment, a film seemed to come before them, and they were wonderfully dim and soft. An arm was put about his neck; the voice dropped to a moving tenderness, full of grief and pity.

'I will not speak it of thee neither. A curse on him that made thee so! Ah, that day! She would importune me—child, she would importune me for a sight of thee—a little speech—one kiss, to ease her load of shameful yearning. And I, though I feared the issue, consented; I sent Clerivault to prepare the way. And he—that evil man—he looked on thee with hate, did he? And well he might, to see such evidences of his own villainy. She was ever sweet and trustful—nay, you shall hear it all—my Jane, my little sister—and he a smooth-tongued liar. It was at Mary's Court they met, she a lady-in-waiting, and he, already a wedded man, just out from the Tower—would to God he had shared his father's fate there—made Master of the Queen's ordnance. A curse upon his house! But she ever believed in him—she died believing in him. Ah died, my girl! And we had been children

here together—bred in the old faith—in her heart she never abandoned it—she clung to where she loved. It was that guided my choice of thy preceptor, thine adoptive father—a good old man, but weakly recusant, known to me by name and repute. A Protestant, forsooth? Neither that nor the other, but a Catholic with views moderated by the Reform movement. So were we all: so was the Queen herself, till Cecil drove her to intolerance: so was—no, he was never but a plausible time-server—a perjurer and false-swearer. Yet he gave thee life, Brion—he gave thee life.'

His voice broke: he had spoken spasmodically, and with great emotion, and the effort seemed to have exhausted him. But to Brion's young soul the confession had brought a tragic resignation which was almost like peace after storm. Long half-suspecting the truth, he knew now what he was, and what he could never be. His brain was busy as he knelt. To make a name or inherit one—which was the nobler? He could be anything in the wide world but that one thing, and that one thing was the one thing in the wide world no child of earth could ever achieve for himself. There was no question of personal credit connected with it, and he would be a poor moralist who should hold him to blame for another man's fault. So reasoned the sane young philosopher. He could be all that he chose, except the one thing in which he had no choice, and he was not debarred by that single exception from the best thing of all, which was certainly self-respect. For his own sweet erring mother he felt the tenderest love and pity; towards the instrument of her undoing nothing but animosity. No ethical qualms moved him there; bad was bad, by whatever name you called it.

'He gave my mother to shame,' he said, presently and quietly, in answer to his Uncle's last appeal: 'and I shall ever hate him for it.'

'Hush, boy!' said Bagott, lifting his head. 'You know not what you say, or of whom you speak.'

'Do I not, Uncle? His name was uttered that day by one that served him, and whom he struck for revealing it.'

'My God! was it so? Nathless you must not hate him. It is not for the lamb to hate the bear—nay, the royal lion himself, as may come to hap. Forget him, an thou canst do naught else. On thy life never breathe his name in choler. The air is as full of ears as he of power. Have I not reason to hate him too; yet for thy sake will I put him and his misdeeds from my mind.'

Brion did not answer; but after a moment he rose to his feet, and stood erect before the seated figure. He would keep his own proud counsel thenceforth, in all matters affecting his honour and duty. His head was lifted, his eyes shone; before their authority the other's blinked and were lowered.

'Uncle,' he said: 'what for my sake thou mayst do I might not for my own. Yet for what for my sake thou hast done, my love and gratitude shall endeavour. Hast thou not been my better father, and from the first?'

'From the first, boy: I made thee my charge to sorrow and to silence. Yet, though I planned to consign thee to oblivion, my thoughts pursued thee. Thou wert the last of us—her child. I could not forget that nor thee; and when curst Fortune made of my life a ruined waste—Ah, what disgrace on thee like mine! 'Twas then in bitter self-scorn I first claimed

thee kinsman; for was I not done honour in the connexion?'

He spoke and bowed his head again. He had forgotten, in his emotion, that to this child his retirement figured as a voluntary exile. But Brion paid no heed, nor seemed to notice what he had said. His eyes still shone.

'Uncle,' he said; 'now it is confessed and done with, I ask one only thing of thee—never to let word be uttered between us on this subject again. From this moment I would begin a new life—my own. I will make myself, who should be the best architect of mine own honour. Will you?'

And the compact was made; and from that hour kept unbroken between them.

CHAPTER XVII

CERTAIN VISITORS

SOMEWHERE in the late summer of '77 there came to the Moated Grange early one morning two visitors, of whom one was destined to exert a considerable influence on Brion's fortunes. These were Sir Richard Grenville, and a young connexion of his named Walter Raleigh, both West Border gentlemen of good family, and one of them, the elder, holding some sort of official position as County Sheriff. This latter was a strong, compact, saturnine man of thirty-seven, rough bearded and voiced, and with a manner which halted, if at all, on the near side of offence; in all of which characteristics he afforded as complete a contrast as was possible with his companion, whose extreme graces of courtesy and geniality, together with a handsome gallant presence, made only more emphatic the coarse grain of the other. This Mr Raleigh was but lately home, it seemed, from fighting in the Low Countries, where he had played the part of a good soldier against the King of Spain, and earned for himself a reputation which he was quite prepared to stake against the most extravagant throws of Fortune. He was a tallish young man of twenty-five, very shapely in the limbs, with a white hand and a comely intellectual face, rather over-high in the forehead, but with noble brown eyes, which, at a tale of arms and chivalry, would glow like living fires. His human weakness—if weakness it were to

treat so fine a body delicately—lay in a certain over-gallantry of attire. He loved fine clothes, and knew how to wear them to effect. Now, though he was by the road, and only country folk to appraise him, he was dressed as though to attend a Queen's junketting—from embroidered bonnet to long Flemish boots of soft leather a star of fashion. His little pointed beard was scented, as were his cheveril gloves; he had jewels in his ears; his gilt spurs 'rang the morris-dance.' And yet to judge him effeminate would have been to invite disaster. There is a form of foppishness about which it does not do to assume that it lacks the courage of its opinions; and here was a wrist as strong and supple as the wit behind it was virile.

The two gentlemen—the one in virtue of his office, the other of his own engaging assurance, it seemed—appeared as uninvited guests; but there was little doubt as to the purpose of their visit. Rumours, in an unfriendly neighbourhood, had got abroad as to the supposed Papistical tendencies of the master of the Grange, and the Sheriff considered, or made, it his business to inquire into the matter. He did so, to do him justice, frankly and at first hand, and would accept no hospitality, for himself and his companion, until he was satisfied as to the baselessness of the accusation. Convinced of which, he consented for them to dine and lie the night at the Grange, and Phineas was put to his mettle to provide a feast worthy of the occasion.

Brion, having been early astir, with Clerivault, on the moors after wild fowl, did not encounter the newcomers until he came in to dinner at eleven o'clock. But his surprise on finding them there was

so graced by tact in his greeting as to appear more like gratification than wonder.

He had developed in these three years into a prepossessing young man of nineteen, lithe and well-proportioned, with a smooth rather pale complexion, and the most winning gray eyes full of gravity and humour. His fair hair had deepened a thought in tone, and even more so his eyebrows and lashes, once described as mouse-coloured, but now a well-marked umber, while a definite shadow pencilled his lip. Always possessed of an attractive manner, though shy in its expression, his earlier reserve had yielded to an unaffected friendliness which was as sincere as it was captivating. Self-reliance and a certain beauty of mind had wrought of this youngster a very maiden knight, whose sword was as ready as his word to uphold that religion of honour which he had made his own. What he owed to himself he paid in sweetness and forbearance to others; yet there was a humour in him which saved him very adequately from the saint. He could be ebullient sometimes, and do things of which he repented. Yet among these was never to be counted a lapse from one fixed ideal. Dedicated to his lady's service, he would be pure and chivalrous for her sake, nor, for her sake, would he ever break his virgin plight, unless, by blessed fortune, it were to achieve in her the desire of his heart. So he was resolved, vowing it should be his Joan for him or none, and in the meantime what arms and enterprise fell to him he would use to her sole renown, whereby he would be constantly pledged to the nobility his birth denied him.

This firm resolution—the more inflexible, perhaps from the lack of any temptation, in that masculine

community, to reconsider it—had lasted since the closing of that brief romance had left him, as he thought, with a broken heart. It all seemed very far away now; such episodes in the full years of youth fade quickly into the background of dim memories. He could afford, perhaps, to smile at it, and at the tragic intensity of the grief which had predicted for him an eternity of unforgetting anguish. Yet, though that dear apparition might never materialise for him again, the love it had engendered in his soul still made itself a sanctuary there, and called to be revered and honoured for the dream's sake. It had no more to build on. In all these years the family had never returned to the Chase, nor, hugging that poignant secret to his heart, could he venture to seek information as to its possible plans and movements. She was gone from him, it seemed, never to return; and gone to what fate? For long he had suffered intolerable torment, raging over her peril and his own helplessness. But the impotence of his agony had proved its cure. He had learned first despair from it and then resignation. At least they had had those lovely moments together which had been all their own. No power on earth could rob him of that possession, or spoil its sweetness for him so long as he himself kept it spotless. And so he had preserved his dream and become a knight of dreams.

That steadfast sentiment had been one factor in the forming of the boy's character, as his relations with his Uncle had proved another. It is melancholy to record that the ex-Judge had at this date degenerated into something little removed from an habitual sot. His vice had steadily grown upon him under his nephew's eyes, until, for all his inexperience and reluctance to

believe, Brion had been forced into a recognition of the truth. He took it passionlessly, gravely, and set about to adapt his conduct to the newly-realised conditions. There could be no question of coercive or of remonstrant measures with a spirit of that force and authority; instead, he devoted himself to hedging about an evil which he could not remove, and so hiding its worst manifestations from the world. The drunkard watched, with a drunkard's cunning, the nature of these means so privily taken to safeguard his reputation, and was leeringly tickled or gloomily affected by them according to his mood. But they had this inevitable effect upon him, that he took to leaning more and more upon his nephew's resourcefulness and quiet strength of will, until in the end it ensued that Brion became virtual master of the house, ordering its affairs and attending to its accounts. And that was only to anticipate events indefinitely, for he had long been made and legally attested sole heir to all the little property, including house and messuage, which his Uncle still possessed.

Clerivault knocked thrice on the sideboard with a rolling-pin, and the company assembled to its dinner in the great hall. The meal consisted of two courses, the items of which, for any who may care to consult them, figured as follows :—

First Course.

Calves'foot soup
Poached eggs with hop-tops
Roasted hare and forcemeat balls
Fried hasty pudding
Mushrooms done in batter
Black-caps (or applejohns—baked apples served in custard).

SECOND COURSE.

Fried lampreys
A mess of cocks' combs
Roasted crane
Spiced vegetables with eggs
A great pasty of boar's head
Radishes
Flavons, or open cheesecakes

—with copious canary, malmsey, and flagons of strong October ale to wash all down. The host, bare-headed, muttered for grace a brief *Benedictus Benedicat*, to which all, save Grenville, removed their hats—to put them on again to dine in.

'I doff to no Latin,' said the Sheriff, with a scowl.

Bagott moistened his unsteady lips with his tongue. He looked ill and agitated. The unexpectedness of this visit, with the moral of watchfulness and suspicion it implied, had sent his nerves by the board. He was the mere delapidated ruin of his former self, bloated, coarsened, discoloured. He could not control the twitching of his features or the aphasia which muddled his speech. The signs of his infirmity were too patent on him for any to mistake the cause. He only stared, hearing the rebuke, as if at a loss for its provocation. But Raleigh came to the rescue.

'Unless to *caput aperio*,' said he gaily. 'For my part I would not be so churlish to an old friend.'

'No friend of mine,' growled the other. 'I always hated it—a Popish crafty language. I was no College ape' (Raleigh had been at Oriel) 'to learn to mince and lisp in tricked-up phrases. A dead language, forsooth! Ay, and vampires they that feed on it. Give me full-blooded English for my share.'

'To bless the food, withal? An you spoke your fullest,

we'd see it blasted rather. I'll say *Benedicat* with all my heart, and see no more craft in it than a short cut to the joint. Come, Dick: a pledge to our host in better grace.'

Grenville drank it—surlily enough; but it warmed him to a reluctant if temporary urbanity. He was one of those who cannot concede a thing gracefully. He had suspected, perhaps wished to suspect, this man; his suspicions allayed, he grudged himself his own convincement. But already his civility was tempered with contempt when he saw the sort of creature he had to deal with. He had no eyes for any tragedy in this ruin; but only for the baseness of its material aspect; and when, as the dinner proceeded, and the ex-Judge, stimulated by copious libations, steadied, and ran a brief spasmodic stage of brilliancy, only to slide unexpectedly into a condition of maudlin incoherence, he shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, and, virtually turning them on his host, addressed himself for the remainder of the meal to Brion. Raleigh seemed to feel the young man's discomfort, and to sympathise with it; but he could do no more than endeavour to keep the conversation on as natural a plane as possible.

'This house?' he asked once, interested in some chance allusion to the place: 'it is a rare and old one?'

Brion did not know; but Grenville, who was well posted in local history, answered dogmatically for him:—

''Twas re-built in the Crookback's reign, by one Miles Bagott, a Yorkist franklin. That was always a family, cry you mercy, young gentleman, to back the wrong horse.'

Bagott, some spark rekindling in his fuddled brain,

looked the length of the table, with glazed eyes and a tipsy leer.

'The wrong horse,' said he, in a thick disjointed voice —'the wrong horse may suttimes have the better tidle, and may hap to come to its own in the end.'

All eyes were turned on the speaker.

'The better title, master?' asked Grenville, with a sneer. 'What better title? To the crown?'

The drunkard pursed his lips and nodded his head extravagantly. He had said, his manner expressed, all he meant to say.

The two visitors exchanged a quick glance; and then Grenville remarked, as if by design :—

'Nathless I would not put Queen Mary of Scotland's chance at a copper-mite.'

Both he and Raleigh seemed to wait for an answer; but none coming, save in more inebrious nods and chuckles, the former, with a 'Bah!' contemptuously uttered under his breath, turned again to Brion, who sat quite at a loss for the meaning of this passage, and continued:—

'Withal this family *hath* been'—with a significant emphasis on the 'hath'—'more creditable in its members than always in its tenants. You've heard of him that lived and died here before your day?'

'Matthew Fulk the miser, Sir?'

'So they called him. It might be. 'Twas the name of a bloody picaroon, had sailed the seas and pillaged and murdered in his time. He was said to have treasure hid here; and to have killed and pitched down the well some young conveniency that lived with him, and that came to learn too much. Wives' tales, I doubt not. There was nothing found after his death. I saw him

once, an old sanctimonious buck-fitch, in whose mouth butter had not melted.'

Brion listened, with open eyes. Here was a new garnish to an old tale which greatly enhanced its savour. A pirate! And the poor maid had found out his secret! At least that was a more plausible story than the demoniac immolation imagined by Mother Harlock.

'*I* should like to sail the seas,' said he, his eyes shining; 'but for a better purpose than robbery and murder.'

For the first time the grim Sheriff looked at him with interest.

'What purpose?' said he.

'To carry England's fame from land to land,' answered the young man, 'and, as doughty knighthood used, to uphold my mistress peerless against all the world.'

'God's 'slid! and so she is!' cried Clerivault, in a high ecstatic voice. He had remained, a privileged attendant, when the meal was over, to carry the wine about. The Sheriff bent astonished wrathful brows on the daring interjector; but Raleigh regarded him with an amused curiosity.

'What's that, Sir donzel?' said he. 'You love your England?'

It was to put spark to tow, and set it flaring unquenchably. Clerivault forgot his duty, his company, his place, and broke forthwith, his eyes glittering, into a wild rhapsodic paean on his native land:—

'Love her—ha! As the flower loves the sun, the parched soul water, the woman her way, the kid its milky dam. To carry England's fame? Aye, thou dear gentle—through all the lands, like a sweet western gale that rains life and health on the dearth it visits.

She shall make conquests, ha! but such as the liberal light makes of cramped darkness. We'll go together; teach the world to know her for what she is; so sing her sweet and pastoral praises that whole peoples shall lay down their arms for very love, and yield themselves her subjects and her slaves. Earth shall surrender to her beauty, as willingly as it yields its frozen winters to spring with her daffodils and milk-white hawthorns. For where England sets her feet, does not the primrose break? She brings the atmosphere of her free and equitable fields into where'er she enters; and straight from that lovely invasion are born the darling wind-flower that is Our Lady's child, and cowslips known for St Peter's keys to Heaven, and wild hyacinth, our own St George's bells that fought and slew the beast, and radiant mary-buds that cure most ills. These shall spring up, where'er we go, like Thebes its towers, to our song, and win the soils we tread to England. Or if we die, we die for England's sake, and take possession with our fruitful bodies. All lands where English blood is shed and England's sons lie buried are in part fiefs to England; for there each grave becomes a plat of English mould, rich breeding-ground of truth and chivalry, fair play, honour to the better man, forbearance in strength—all qualities summed up in this, the heart to conquer and the hate to pain. O, it is good to live for England, but sweeter still to die and be her prolific dust! Peerless, in truth, our fair mother—I take the word, sweet soul, from thee, as I would have thee take me with thee in the sharing of thy quest.'

He ceased; his voice fell; but silence still seemed to ripple on his lips, while the rapt exaltation in his eyes

died slowly out. Raleigh applauded, with a somewhat kindling vision :—

'Well sung!' he said: 'Here is another as passionate lover of his land.'

But the practical Sheriff snorted, finding little to understand in these dithyrambics.

'I know naught of your cowslips and wind-flowers,' he grumbled. 'A general were best to take wheat and barley with him, where he foresees a long besiegement, and sow them in the open ground. And as to atmospheres, for all I'm a loyal Devon man, I'd liefer chance the fortunes of another climate than take my own with me.'

Raleigh laughed out: 'O, thou rare Dick!' and Brion, fearing to follow his example, rose, and went to Clerivault, and, gripping his hand, looked in his face with a whispered word :—

'It shall be share and share alike, friend, when the time comes.'

The dinner finished, and Clerivault left to care for his master, who had fallen fast asleep with his head on the table, Brion went with his guests into the open air, where, strolling in the Courtyard, they came upon Nol porter at friendly trials of strength with Raleigh's servant, one Nicholas Wright, a bulky Yorkshireman. And them they provoked to a wrestling bout on the sward, in which neither could best the other; after which the Sheriff, in his turn, fell asleep on a bench and snored in the sun. Then did this Mr Raleigh, with a very winning way he had, inviting and giving confidence in one, slip his arm under the young man's, and ask him to come with him a little walk towards the moors, for that he had something of moment for his private

ear. And Brion, foreseeing, perhaps, what was to follow, and naturally pleased, as a boy, over the condescension of so superlative a gallant, very willingly consented.

'That is a rare fellow of thine, the patriot cup-bearer,' said the soldier, as, leaving the bridge, they walked on together. 'It warmed my heart to hear him.'

Brion smiled. 'It was one Harlequin Clerivault, a creature as fantastic as his name, but with a heart of gold. You touched him on the quick, Sir. To start his brain on the subject of England is like laying open an emmet heap with your foot. It is a house gone wild at a blow.'

'Well, I love him for it. Whence came the oddity?'

'I know not; but the first of him for us was'—he paused, remembering his bond, and his cheek reddened.

'Nay,' said the other, quietly observant, 'no need for you to answer. No need, mayhap, in the double sense, chancing I know already.'

'You know?'

'Why, what a tone? Think you it is no part of the duties of my friend the Sheriff to acquire some knowledge of his neighbours' antecedents? Well, if this man of yours ought his peril to the monks he favoured, and his neck to your Uncle, that was long days ago, and certes in these he plays the part, with you, of a good Churchman. But why, lad, does your kinsman, the ex-Judge, never worship with his nephew in St Andrew's Church in Ashburton?'

'Because,' began Brion—and stuck. He felt stupefied. This revelation of a sort of furtive vehmgericht sitting on their conduct, the while they had been living untroubled and unsuspecting, took him like a blow. But Raleigh laughed good-humouredly:—

'Judge me for no inquisitor: only, remembering things, and setting this with that—you have never heard, mayhap, what put him out of favour with the Court?'

'I heed no gossips, Sir,' said the boy proudly; and then, remembering who had been his informant, blushed again, in grief at having so belied his innocent dear.

'Well,' said the other; 'I say no more—only that it were a small wisdom on his part to condescend to bridle those same gossips by attending the reformed service now and again. Yet he may say he knows his own business better than I can tell him—and that's the truth. For me, who both come and give advice uninvited, it is reassurance enough to have heard that passionist declaim. No schism worth the name in a house where such sentiment could answer such sentiment as his answered thine! That is the true orthodoxy for me—and eke shall be for my kinsman Dick Grenville. Loves England, quotha! By God he does—by God he does. And you'—he stopped in his walk, and looked Brion very honestly in the face. 'Now,' said he, 'I am going to be as frank with you as I dare trust you will be with me; and I do entreat you to believe in my well-meaning candour, the which is designed to no insidious end, but wholly to serve one whom I am greatly inclined to love, and who I desire shall accept me for a true friend—yourself.'

What young fellow in Brion's case would not have been touched by such a declaration from such a man? He answered, much moved, that his friendship was Master Raleigh's for the asking.

'And confidence,' said the other, 'as between two brothers, the elder of whom hath gained some wisdom in the world.'

'And confidence,' repeated Brion in a low voice.

'Then,' said Raleigh, 'here's at it. Your Uncle let fall but now at dinner a remark somewhat pertinent to the matter which brought us hither. You heard it, and Grenville's answer. I'll be open with you. There are whispers of some plot toward to dethrone the Queen and put Mary of Scotland in her place. You know nothing of it?'

'Nothing—just Heaven!'

'Nor your Uncle?'

Brion looked at him sadly.

'You see what he is.'

'I see,' said the other, 'and pity him and you. Then you think he is not involved?'

'Not possible. He receives no correspondence; sees nobody, unless enforced; for years has held himself quite secluded.'

'No midnight priests—no disguised emissaries of Spain?'

'None. O!' said the boy, 'that I should have to say it. He hath become the very nerveless ruin of a man, incapable of plotting, of resisting even for one brief hour the enemy that kills him. If he had cunning in those words at all, I trow it was the cunning of a lawyer's brain, haunted in its decay with old thoughts of deeds and titles.'

Raleigh, pondering the speaker, did not answer for some moments; then he heaved a great sigh, as of relief, and, recapturing the boy's arm, the two resumed their stroll.

'That's like enow,' said he—'and so I'll acquaint Grenville. 'Tis happily resolved; and now we'll talk of other things.'

And so he did, and charmingly. He was full of life and anecdote. He was on his way to London shortly, where, he said, his pack of small accomplishments would find their most profitable market. 'For,' said he, 'in all the world it is the little things gain great rewards, since man, being little, judges by little. But greatness must be content even with itself, since it cannot be content with little.' He urged Brion to come with him; to persuade his impossible kinsman to let him go; to throw off the shackles of imagined duty which kept him wasting his young life among boors in a rustic isolation, and take that place in the world to which his gentle breeding and physical graces entitled him. He was frankly complimentary: he had obviously taken a fancy to the young fellow. He even hinted to him, though with a subtle delicacy, that he might find his bar sinister *no* bar to his social advancement, but rather the contrary. And Brion understood without resentment. He had long decided his own attitude towards that question: for one thing to accept it as, virtually, an open secret; for another, to refuse to suffer for it in any way to himself, since honour was a matter of conscience, and not of arbitrary bestowal. But he only thanked his new friend, and answered that, like that friend himself, he must win his spurs before he took his reputation to market.

'And so thou shalt,' said the other admiringly. 'Thou shalt carry thy quest knight-errantly, and strike for England's name. Would I could go with thee to bruit her virtues. But the time may come. I see a vision in the West of a land great for adventure—the arena, it may hap, where shall be fought to a final settlement our quarrel with idolatrous Spain. Shall we leave all

this and sail there together? Who knows what may come to pass. But first—the spurs. Is England, I am fain to ask, thine only love? A paladin so devout should wear a lady's sleeve about his helm.'

Brion gave a little gasp, and the blood rushed to his heart. He had never yet spoken his secret to living soul. Should he break that silence now? He was suddenly and irresistibly tempted, such surety of earnest faith and sympathy he felt in this young soldier. Before he could resolve, the words were out of him :—

'Mayhap I do.'

'That's well,' said Raleigh. 'No such incitement to chivalry in all the world. She's sweet and fair, I know. Her name, that thy boon comrade may hold it housed and honoured in his heart!'

The young man hesitated one moment, then turned and looked the other glowingly in the eyes.

'Joan Medley,' he said.

'Joan Medley!' repeated Raleigh, and struck his breast: 'There it lies shrined.'

'You know her—have heard of her, perchance?' asked Brion, the blood flushing his skin now that the murder was out. But the soldier shook his head.

'Is she of this side? My home is *Fardel* in Cornwood, east of Plymouth; and even so I am but late returned to it, having been long in France and the Low Countries.'

And then Brion told him all his secret, for what was the use to withold the rest, when he had confessed so much. And as he spoke, the glamour of that sweet time returned upon him, so that his voice grew husky with passion and grief, and the recognition of that loss which could never now be made good.

'Nay,' said his comforter at the end: 'never's

no word for love. A City knight, and I for London! I'll get you news of her—contrive you meet again. She's not forgot thee—take my word on't. That face would linger in a maiden's heart. Be of best cheer. Shalt hear from me within the month.'

His bright confidence had its effect upon the lover. Hope, like a blown-on-spark, began to glow and travel in his breast again. But still he shook his head:—

'What an he hath forced her to wed where she abhorred?'

'What an he hath not?' was the answer. 'I detect a touch of self-will in your lady. She would have her way on occasion. And she a spoilt and only child. Come, brave heart! We'll pledge a silent toast to your re-meeting, at table this night.'

And they did so, their eyes encountering, while Brion thrilled all through.

There was little talk at supper—from which the host was absent—save for the young soldier's recounting some of his experiences in the Low Countries. And, of those, what most impressed itself on Brion's mind was a description of a certain engagement with the forces of Don John of Austria, natural son to the Emperor, in which, the day being sultry, the English—among whom was Raleigh—had flung off their armour and hacketons, and fought in their shirts, with a fury that had routed the enemy, though superior in numbers, and driven him to flight and confusion. And that was to be Englishmen all over, bold and reckless to folly, yet having confidence in nothing so much as the clean sheer force of their English blood to carry them through.

The little company went to bed early; and early next morning the gentlemen took their departure,

Raleigh with many expressions of affection and reassurance to his young host, and even Sir Richard, gruffly unbending, with a word of what he meant to be courtly acknowledgement of the hospitality vouchsafed them.

Brion, with a kindling heart, watched them ride away.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOPE DEFERRED

A MONTH passed, and still the promised communication from London delayed to come. The interval was spent by Brion in alternations of feverish hope and stoic resignation: now he would rise to heights of glowing expectancy, crediting his intrepid friend, in whose vocabulary the word impossible seemed to have no place, with an almost supernatural sagacity, now lament that he had ever permitted those old emotions, long precipitated and settled down, to be stirred up again to his futile misery. It was and could be nothing but an idle dream. Even were his lady, by any mad chance, as yet unwed, was it credible that a life so full, so prosperous and so courted as hers must have been during these years would have remained dedicate to that childish memory, or have come to regard it—at best, perhaps, with a little humorous tenderness—as anything but the half-forgotten idyll of a summer's day? No, it was not credible, and it was a bitter weakness in him ever to have listened to that insidious tempter who had set re-flaming in him a long subdued fire. Out with it; cold water it; stamp it down, and this time for good and all!

And then straight the revulsion would follow, and he would bemoan himself for a false knight, whose faith was not proof against the first test of separation. Had she not vowed herself his for evermore, chosen him her

champion, pledged him to an eternal fidelity, declared passionately that she would kill herself rather than be made untrue to him? Base and craven, he was unworthy to be called her lover, who could so misdoubt her, lacking a shred of evidence.

And so swung the pendulum, this way and that, until there came a memorable day—but well into the second month—when the longed-for despatch was actually delivered into his hands, and conveyed by him to a private place, and there eagerly broken and read.

The young Captain wrote very pleasantly, in the Italian script then growing into fashion with the cultured, and in that fluent graceful style which presently came to make him notable among writers of note. He was very much occupied, it appeared. He had made his début at Court and been well received. He was full of engagements and plans and ambitions, and he discoursed at some length on the flattering attentions he had excited, seeming to linger a little complacently over this opportunity to draw his own portrait for his own behoof. Indeed, it was Raleigh, Raleigh most of the way, until the hasty postscript, and in that he referred again to the advisability of his young friend coming to enlarge his views of life in London, adding last, for all the satisfaction of his reader, these words:—

'Think not I have forgot my promise to serve you in a certain matter, the will whereto, were I my own master, should bring it to a short conclusion. The truth is, if I could turn to it, my worries were the less, seeing I am so beset with divers claims and importunities that scarce can I call a moment of my time my own. Yet, be patient: patience proves oft the speedful suitor.'

Patience! To one on the rack! Brion read the missive through; and read it through again; and turned it up and down for any hint of more; then put it from him with a half whimsical sigh, and called himself a fool. He had no belief from that moment in any power to help him. The shock of disappointment had steadied his reason and brought him to himself again. Perhaps that was as well. Had it not been a poor fibreless love, he thought, that could engage a friend to contrive for it? Her champion! and he had insulted her rather through that weak commission. Never again. Henceforth his own sole resources should serve him, whether to win or fail.

He went thus resolved about his customary duties, expecting no further satisfaction from his friend, and receiving none. Alas! too instantly successful in negotiating his 'pack of small accomplishments,' it is to be feared that that brilliant soldier of fortune had already lost conceit with those minor obligations which involved even a small measure of self-sacrifice. He was too absorbed over his own affairs to bestow a thought on another's. Only once again, after a long interval, did he write, and that once again, in almost the same words, though carrying even less conviction, make his assurance of unforgetfulness. And after that no further letter came from him: he was launched full-flood on that prosperous and tragic tide which was to convey him by darkening stages to Traitor's Gate and the block. Brion heard of him once as gone, in Lord Deputy Gray's company, to Ireland, where he made a fine name for himself, and was confirmed in his royal mistress's favour, by helping to put down the Earl of Desmond's rebellion. But long before the date

of that event he had passed—save as a picturesque memory, not untenderly recalled for all his particular shortcoming—out of the young man's mind, so that any renewal of their intimacy was the last thing in the world expected by the latter. And yet it was to come to happen, and on the Captain's return from that very expedition which was to add so greatly to his fortune and renown.

In the meantime, Brion took up his life again as it had been before that feverish interlude had come to disturb and excite it. He recovered his philosophy, went resolutely about his business, and extracted what enjoyment he could from his always ambiguous position. That, because it kept him proudly aloof, both on his Uncle's and his own account, from contact with his neighbours, was the source in him of an invincible self-reliance. As he matured in years, the spirit of independence strengthened in him, as his body, habituated to incessant physical exercise, toughened and grew compact. At twenty-three he was a fine-looking young fellow, attractive of face, shapely of limb, and as well-endowed mentally as he was skilful of his hands. He had a few friends, but he sought none. Those who wanted him must seek him; and a handful of kindred spirits did. But Clerivault remained always, and first and foremost, his comrade. They rode, and went fishing or hawking together—sometimes in young company—or made occasional expeditions far afield, penetrating to Exeter, Tavistock, Plymouth, or divers such places on the seabord as Brixham, Lyme and Bridport, where they made acquaintance with ships and shipping, and now and then chaffered with some local skipper for a run along the coast. At these times

they would be away not infrequently for nights together, returning immensely pleased and instructed from their trips. Nor did the Uncle oppose any objection to this practice of enterprise and independence in his nephew. He was by now grown so submissive to the younger will as virtually to defer to its quiet dictation in most matters, even to the extent of moderating that particular self-indulgence which had been destroying him—moderating, would it could be said, to happy effect; but the evil was done. He had sown that in his brain which could not be uprooted, and, for all he was become more temperate, his grosser state was replaced in these days by an unquiet melancholy and fancifulness, which bid fair to complete the mental ruin the other had begun. Among their manifestations became ever a little and a little more pronounced one which caused Brion no small uneasiness; and that was a form of religious depression, in which he brooded on his misfortunes as the direct judgment of Heaven on him for his apostasy. It was no use arguing with him: the more one desired to save him, the more resolute he was to be damned. So the thing had to be humoured, and just left to its own possible cure.

Now, as to his relations with, or attitude towards, the other sex, a word calls to be spoken for Brion. It is not to be supposed that so sweet and débonnaire a youth could in all these years wholly escape the regard of admiring eyes, or fail to arouse in amorous bosoms sentiments to which the knowledge of a bar sinister might be counted a provocation rather than a hindrance. Not only in the breast of rustic Phillida, but in hers of the Hall or Manor, would sighs at times heave up and tender thoughts be born, children of a vision of young

manliness not less caressingly encountered because some senseless ban of Orthodoxy professed to hold it forbidden. There might be dreams on pillows for Brion of which *he* never dreamed; there might be looks in chance meetings, swift offered and withdrawn, which had been eloquent to a forwarder spirit. Perhaps he read them better than appeared. He was no hypocrite to himself; and if he was a Joseph, it was from no self-righteous prudery, but because, summarising all women in one, he wished to hold the sex immaculate. It was not in the least that he was insensible to its inherent fascinations—to its beauty, its softness, and its lovableness; it was that truth was dearer to him than all things, and that he had taken his oath and meant to keep it. His will was stronger than his emotions: if it had been otherwise, he could have found plenty to invite him to surrender it, in a way much more unequivocal than might be expressed in blushes and covert glances. But he kept his heart high, and his shield stainless.

For all his fond intimacy with Clerivault, he had never thought fit to confide to that good friend a hint of his secret. It would have been loyally kept, he knew, yet in some way cheapened in the sharing. Nor, for any reason or none, had he ever spoken to him of that discovery of his in the old well-house. Perhaps his reticence was due to that past expressed determination of his to treat as closed and sealed the wound, with all its details of pain and loneliness, caused by the other's desertion of him. In any case he kept his knowledge to himself. But once in all this time had he descended again into the secret chamber; and that was shortly after Master Grenville's revelations had

set him thinking and wondering about the reputed hidden treasure. He had had no fear of being watched or detected in his visit: there was no one but himself in the house would have gone near the place: it was shunned by all alike; and about the ilex thicket which enclosed it Nol, in clearing the garden, had left a neutral zone of waste ground, which none would have crossed though the fiend were behind to urge him. But he discovered nothing new to reward his curiosity. It was just the bare dank little chamber of his knowledge, all lined with obdurate stone, and giving off when sounded no hint of anything but impenetrable solidity. So he abandoned the search, and henceforth thought no more upon the matter; nor did he visit the place again until years had passed, and then on an errand very different from that comprised in a hunt for buried gold.

. . . . . .

It was in the late Autumn of '81 that Raleigh appeared again. He came riding by the London to Plymouth road, in company with his servant Nic Wright and a small body of retainers, and turned apart from his way for the express purpose of revisiting, and renewing his acquaintance with, his young country friend, and perhaps, who knows, of impressing him with a sight of his magnificence. He was become a great man in these days, and in high report with the Queen, who had taken his side in a dispute he had had with the Lord Deputy, following his recent return from Ireland, and seemed disposed to admit him to her extremest favour. No doubt her Majesty had ample reason for this condescension to a soldier who had rendered her such fine and masterful service; yet no question was but

that good looks and a flattering tongue had their part in the honours and emoluments which from this date came to be lavished on the fortunate favourite. And indeed the man was built for valiant success. He was of a bold and masterful disposition, imaginative, and even chivalrous for an age in which romanticism, no longer the purely spiritual force of earlier days, survived but as a sort of working Utopianism, full of great visions of the unknown, but regarding that in the light of material rather than of moral possession. Then his intellect was as boundless as his ambition, and as ready to take the whole world for its province; he had a silver tongue for verse, when rhymers were as many and sweet as blackberries; he was as full of curious inventiveness as was his near forerunner, the Italian da Vinci, and not less in the graver articles of chemistry and science than in those of gallantry; and most of all he was a fierce patriot—one of those mighty Elizabethan Captains from whose loins sprang that greater Britain which was offspring of their passionate love for their country. 'His naeve was,' says old Aubrey, 'that he was damnable proud.' Well, he might be, being great among the great, and he clothed his pride in splendour. The same Chronicler is not wholly complimentary to his appearance, though he admits he was a tall and handsome man. But he wrote from hearsay, and one may feel assured that she, to whom masculine beauty was ever a first recommendation to favour, saw something to admire in her new-found votary besides character. At any rate Brion was aware of no 'sour eie-lidded' deformity in this face, which, with its intellectuality and vivacity, was always to him as attractive a face as any he was acquainted with;

and, as to that high-handed arrogance which was reputed to bring the Captain into dislike with some, he only knew that his manner to him was ever frank and courteous, while, as to the man's own servants, they loved their master to devotion.

He happened to be in the Courtyard when the little cavalcade rode up and in, and advanced to meet his friend, with his eyes shining welcome and a strange stirring at his heart. It was full four years since they had parted, and each showed in his mien and manner the ripening touch of Time. Where had been shyness was self-possession, and where had been self-possession was authority. Raleigh dismounted, while Brion held his stirrup, and, being on the ground, impulsively embraced that courtly young esquire. He was all in meek gray, but bedizened like an argus pheasant with eyes of jewelled enamel. The strap which carried his sword was crusted with emeralds thick as dewdrops on grass, and he wore a sapphire worth a county's ransom in his cap.

''Fore God,' he said, with fervour, holding the youngster from him by the shoulders; 'a proper man! 'Tis good to see the fruit where hung the flower. How many years ago, dear lad?'

'Four,' answered Brion, with a smile. He bore this oblivious correspondent no grudge. He had not, nor ever had, any real claim upon him.

'So many!' said Raleigh. 'I had not thought it. Time must turn up a slow furrow in this land of thine. Would you not rather mount a horse than plod behind it? Come, ride you with me—the way I pointed once before—and leave this ding-dong life for one more like to living, while youth and valour

and hot blood are yours to spend and Time is in his morning.'

Brion shook his head.

'My life contents me well enough.'

The other regarded him humorously a moment.

'Well, I'll persuade you ere I leave,' said he, and turned away, signifying a bench where they might sit and talk. He could not stop long, he said, nor crave any hospitality save a stoup of wine for himself, and some ale, if might be, for his party. He was on his way West to attend to some family business, and would be returning in a few days, when he would call for his friend, and carry him along with him to London. And when Brion set his lips, shaking his head a second time, he only laughed, saying no more for that present. He inquired of Uncle Quentin, his health and condition, but in an indifferent inattentive way, caring only, it seemed, for the man's presumptive attitude towards a possible proposal to leave him by himself awhile; and he showed some small curiosity as to the manner of his friend's life during the interval which had separated them, but without once alluding to their correspondence or appearing to remember his own failure to vindicate a certain promise given. Nor did Brion think it worth while to remind him. When Sorrow is asleep, says the adage, wake it not.

They drank together when the wine came, and pledged each the other like good comrades. The soldier looked with real and constant admiration on the stripling who sat beside him, whom he had left a boy and taken up a man.

'So,' said he, 'my knight-errant still lacks to cry his country's fame about the world; and, for all that

high emprise, must make shift with the spearing of eels in brooks, or to search the hills for coneys, or to loose his tiercel at a trailing heron, or, for ladies' favours, to follow at the kissing-strings of country Moll? Is it this contents him, lord of that glowing vision—to shut the door of the world, and dream on tranquil swards of mighty venturings without, in which he seeks no part? Go to! With that face and form, I'll not believe it. Too near the great sea waters not to have felt their far and passionate lure!'

'I have felt it,' said Brion. 'It is not lack of will, but of opportunity.'

'Opportunity!' cried the other. 'It shall be thine, perchance, for the taking. Long have I had a vision —to plant our English standard in that golden West where Drake has led the way; to take and sow some grist of English manhood there, which, like a lusty crop, shall crowd out the Spanish weed, and come to harvest in a greater England. Ah, for such an expedition! It shapes for ever in my thoughts. Wilt thou go with it—if not as colonist, as soldier, adventurer, knight-errant if thou wilt? There shall be opportunity enow to spread thy mother's fame—ay, and in the most convincing way with sons like thee, right slips to attach the new world to the old with very love-knots. Wilt thou not follow where Drake has shown the way?'

'I may follow, but not Drake's way,' said Brion, with a wry face. 'I would not foul *my* fame by murdering of a dear friend and shipmate.'

He alluded—patently enough to Raleigh's perceptives, for the deed had been notorious—to the great Captain's formal execution, in the course of his famous

expedition of three years earlier, of Thomas Doughty, his lieutenant and once-admired comrade.

Raleigh, lolling back, protested, with a little amused chuckle: 'Not murdered.'

'A scholar and a gentleman,' cried the young man, 'and he had loved Drake like a brother.'

'As Jacob loved Esau—and schemed to out-wit him.' He sat up with a laugh. 'Where is thy dithyrambic patriot--thy dear fantastic glib-gabbit?'

'Clerivault?'

'Ay, that was his name. Lives and declaims he still?'

'He's there, Master Walter. Seest him not—talking with thy servant Nic Wright?'

'Whistle him over. I would fain hear *his* verdict on the deed.'

Brion called to Clerivault, who attended on his summons, and came and stood before the two.

'Master Clerivault,' said the visitor, 'was that Doughty you wot of well served by his Captain or ill?'

Clerivault, sticking one arm akimbo, bent his brows on the speaker.

'Cry you mercy, Sir,' said he: 'a lover of his country had no need to ask.'

'You think he was a traitor to his country?'

'I think it.'

'How?'

'He played for the party that played for Spain to wreck the expedition and render it abortive. Blackest of traitors, that—a professing friend in the house he plots to ruin.'

'He may have thought honestly he served England best by thwarting Drake in his ambitions.'

'What ambitions? God's 'slid! For himself, or to drag his dear land for ever from under the heel of arrogant Spain, where those, the small-souled and timid, the dastards and time-servers, would have held her prostrate for their own safety's sake? Thank God for Drake, I say, who let no claims of love or learning move him in his judgment on a villain; who pierced through all specious arguments holding tolerance of wrong and insult for the truer patriotism, and had the wit and resolution to cut the canker out before it spread. Such men for me in war; and England's scorn on those who would keep her mean and safe!'

'Well, I am well answered,' said Brion, with a laugh; and he rose to his feet, as Raleigh rose also to clap the enthusiast on the shoulder.

'Well spoken,' cried the soldier. 'Art a rare fellow. When another expedition haps, to follow in Drake's footsteps and take thy master with it, I shall look to see thee in his company'—and, with a smiling nod to the patriot, he took Brion's arm and walked the boy away.

'We must to boot and saddle in a minute,' said he. 'But first a whisper in thine ear—of that, which, like the lady's postscript, shall swallow all the text. You'll come with me to London when I return?'

Again Brion shook his head, with a smile over the man's persistence.

'Not at this time, Master Walter. I have much to occupy me.'

'Then will I let fly my last, and hit thee standing. Here's something will prevail. Thy lady lives unwed —doubtless for thy sake.'

A shock like fire seemed to pass through Brion, as if an actual bolt had struck him. He stood quite rigid.

'Ah!' said the other softly. 'Hath that sped home? Methought 'twould prove a killing shot.'

'Joan—Joan Medley?' whispered Brion, in a thick voice. He hardly seemed to know that he spoke.

'The same,' said Raleigh. 'The City Knight's fair daughter, that erst lived at the Chase. The father's been dead these two years, it seems, and she hath all his fortune. I could find it in my heart to envy thee, thou rogue.'

'How—in what way,' began Brion—and stuck.

'Looks she? comports herself?' offered his companion. 'I may not answer for myself, never having seen her. But the facts are safe. I had them from one, a certain popinjay, that calls himself my friend, and that would go a'wooing for a fortune. He came to me for advice, and laid an information where he asked one. I pricked up my ears—that was a week ago—and thanked my heart it could acquit itself at last of a debt too long unliquidated. Well, by your grace, every man's Joan is the one incorruptible; yet, looked at in the abstract, woman's faith is a tricky currency, and, were I you, I'd strike betimes. Such virgin obduracy may stand a long clamorous siege; but the day will come when, looking in the mirror——'

He paused significantly. Brion, pale to the eyes, as if he had been running, made a gesture of despair:—

'What hope could be for me, a nameless dependent!'

Raleigh cried out on him:—

'What hope? And she, with a hundred suitors, still unwed! Come, while there's time! I'll see her; contrive a meeting for thee, so sing thy praises, all her heart shall melt upon the past and flow in one stream of passion towards her olden lover.'

Brion shook his head; but there was a warmth come back to his cheeks and a light to his eyes.

'Bring me but to speech with her: I'll ask no more.'

'You'll come, then?'

The boy broke into a shamefaced laugh.

'It seems so.'

And thus was the surrender made. To London he had pledged himself, and now there was nothing for it but to secure his Uncle's compliance. And that proved an easier matter than he had expected. It may have been that Bagott saw in this separation a temporary relief from that watchfulness which restricted his indulgences and embarrassed his secret devotions —for by now he was quite reverted to his former beliefs; or it may have been that he really wished his nephew to learn to take his independent place in the world, and so to shift any lingering responsibility for his welfare from his own shoulders. In any case he opposed no objection to the trip, but on the contrary expressed a desire to make it as full and pleasurable a one as possible, supplying the young man with ample funds for the occasion, and bidding him not hesitate to write for more should he come to need it.

And so one day, a week later, it came to pass that Brion rode from the Grange, with the great soldier and his retinue for company, and Clerivault on a packhorse jogging in his wake. It was the first time he had taken that road since he had lolled along it, a weary boy, eight years ago: and now, with what different feelings! His very heart sang; for he was on his way to see Joan. He could hardly believe in the reality of that stupendous prospect.

CHAPTER XIX

MARKING TIME

BRION put up at that same *Cock* tavern in Westminster where he had slept on the first night of his journey westward. It was a well-served hostelry in a good locality, and it was within convenient call of his friend the Captain, who, by virtue of his appointment to the Queen's Guard, had been allocated quarters in the royal palace of Whitehall, where her Majesty was now holding her Court. Moreover a certain tenderness of association inclined him to the place, whose reacquaintance, in the light of an enlarged vision, he was curious to make. It stood the test very agreeably, and proved as comfortable a headquarters for him and Clerivault as any more pretentious they might have chanced on.

The paragon was, of course, an experienced Londoner, and it was under his guidance that Brion made his first real acquaintance with the Town. It seemed to him the most beautiful city that mind could conceive. Perhaps that impression may have been partly due to his regarding it, during these first days, through a luminous mist of expectancy touching the person of her whose golden shrine it contained hid somewhere in the depths of its labyrinthine mysteries. But indeed it was a fair town; built up of colour and picturesqueness; beating with a fierce and palpitating life; full of a sort of dashing merriment which reminded Brion somehow of late-fallen raindrops on eaves, dancing

and sparkling and shaking off under a race of wind and brave opened sky. Everybody seemed in a hurry—to sell, to buy, to show off, to fight, to enjoy; as if each day were the last day of the holidays, and the ultimate flavour and profit must be got out of it before the Fair closed. To look down any street was to see its perspective like a turning kaleidoscope, with colours and patterns perpetually changing and forming into new bewildering complications. And there were swinging signs and fluttering banners everywhere, with jingle of harness and blast of horns, as if victory in the abstract was always in the air, and rehearsals for its celebration were a never-ending occurrence.

While he waited, as composedly as he could, news from Raleigh, the youngster turned the time on his hands to the best account of exploration he and Clerivault could contrive. They visited the Abbey, and such parts of the ancient palace of Westminster as had survived the disastrous fire of fifty years before—the Hall, the beautiful Chapel, and the Star and Painted Chambers; they went to Charing village to view the noble cross erected by the first Edward to the memory of his dead Queen; and they pushed further, to the bargate which led into the liberties of the City, a great timber barrier mortised into the adjoining houses, and bearing on its roof a row of iron spikes, some with dried and blackened heads on them, like a grotesque sort of cocoanuts put up for any who listed to roll, bowl, or pitch at. There was one, cocked askew, that seemed to leer at Brion as he hurried beneath it, as if it speculated obscenely on the chances of having him up there for a companion some day; and another that, tilted back, appeared to be watching a flight of rooks

winging overhead. Ugly memento mori they were in such a feast of colour, skulls and cross-bones on an emblazoned standard, yet not so dark a blot on the City as its living profanities. For in St Paul's Church, which the two went to visit, they found the whole nave blocked with unhallowed traffic. Here was a hiring fair for low class servants; there a cheap-jack bawling his goods from a cart, the donkey that drew it standing blinking in the shafts, while a merry-Andrew intervened with coarse jests, or tumbled for the delectation of the gaping crowd. There were groups of thieves and harlots squatted on the pavement about the bases of the great columns, and drinking and quarrelling as they sat. Cheats, gulls, copper-captains, flaunting women and swaggering gallants; the hungry and the homeless; the fugitive and the spy; the clerical parasite and the convicted bankrupt, gathered and mingled here, whether for sanctuary or profit, and made of the Temple one vast house of abomination. Nor might the Queen herself, acting Heaven's vicegerent, scourge the evil forth; for in spite of all her severe edicts for cleansing the place, the swarm would perpetually regather, like flies disturbed from carrion, the moment the interruption was past.

Brion, though willing to be an unimpassioned philosopher, found himself regarding the scene with a regret that the cleansing had not come in a wholesale holocaust, when fire—here also—had, not so many years before, consumed the lofty wooden spire and threatened the whole building with destruction. It had been struck by lightning during a great storm, and it seemed strange that the judgment of God should have withheld itself something short of its complete execution,

But, perhaps, unlike Sodom, there had been found sufficient good men among its Chapter to qualify, for the time being, the Divine chastisement.

The two had soon enough of watching the throng, and of listening to its dull reverberating clamour. The sound, made up of countless volubility and the tramp of innumerable feet, all rising into inarticulate echoes, was like a roar of surf levelled by distance, or the drone of bees in a gigantic hive. It thudded on the brain, producing after a time a feeling of mental numbness, so that Brion was glad to escape into the open, and to draw in air uncontaminated by the foul breath of sacrilege. He had had enough of St Paul's, and did not want to go there again. But that was only one disillusionment in a world of exciting novelties.

One day they went to see the house in Chancellor's Lane where the great Cardinal had lived in the Queen's father's time; and, being so near, paid a visit to Gray's Inn, where Clerivault pointed out to Brion his Uncle's former residence. And the boy looked on the place in silence, a strange emotion at his heart; for were not those rooms known to his mother too, since it was thence the little Book of Hours had been dated? He had never once spoken to Clerivault on that subject, though he was well enough aware that for that faithful soul, being in his master's confidence, it held no secrets. But he could not bring his mind to discuss with any one, however sympathetic, a tragedy so intimate and so sacred.

On another, and a memorable, day, they took boat at Westminster and were rowed down the river, passing by the way between the royal gardens of Whitehall and the Queen's vineyards on the opposite shore, and thence

dropping leisurely, by a succession of stately residences —themselves palaces in their degree, as the great lords who inhabited them were only lesser Kings—to the *Three Cranes* Stairs in Southwark, where they went ashore, and saw a bear-baiting at the Ring in Bankside, and afterwards dined nobly at the Falcon Inn, beloved of wits and playwrights. Thence, returning by way of Blackfriars, they made for the theatre, and saw the Earl of Leicester's servants play in a very tragic tragedy, called *Arden of Feversham*, by one Thomas Kyd—a performance which affected Brion's imagination as vividly as the name of the company over-clouded it.

But it was not the only occasion on which a dark memory was to be recalled to him. For so it happened that, walking one morning with Clerivault in the precincts of Whitehall, they saw the Queen ride forth, with a company of gentlemen, to go a'hawking in the great guarded Chase which stretched away westwards from opposite the palace front, and which came afterwards to be called the Park of St James's. Her Grace was all in green, very handsomely bedecked, and rode a white barb, which stepped and arched its neck as proudly as though it were conscious of the nature of its burden; but Brion had hardly eyes for that pleasant vision, before he was struck aback by the sight of a foremost member of the party who rode close at her Majesty's left hand.

Seventeen transforming years had passed since that face had last appeared to him, yet he was as certain of it as though he again stood, a wondering child, on the Richmond road, and saw the servant ride up, and heard the vicious thwack across the blinded eyes. And, as then, hate and indignation surged up in his

heart, and cried it alien from one so arrogant and so malignant. Splendour and daring were this man's, but gained at every sacrifice of truth and humanity. He had grown in these years somewhat bald and portly, but the cold furtive eye was unchanged, as were the impassive vindictiveness and the measuring cruelty which underlay his whole expression. And yet women could be found to sacrifice to such an idol, and to yield their all to the wicked hypocrisy which, to the masculine observer, simply flaunted itself on that countenance. Truly there must be a blind spot in their psychology, which Love, for the benefit of his own villain sex, had once set there with a kiss. Else how could they so often overlook the obvious.

He passed so close to Brion that the young man could have touched him. He shrank back rather, as from something noisome and unclean, and with such a repellant frown on his face as it was fortunate, perhaps, the great man failed to observe. But he was in close converse with the Queen, and was as inattentive to the rabble about him as though they had been sheep.

But the moment the little party was well gone by, Brion felt his arm gripped by Clerivault. He looked, and saw the paragon's face a sickly yellow, while his eyes were alight with panic.

'God's 'slid!' said he, in a hoarse whisper: 'Why did you do that—look like that? Come away, ere some flying rumour chance to reach his ear!'

'Let it,' answered Brion fiercely. 'I budge for no man's humour.'

'Budge, budge!' cried the other, in a sweat of despair. 'The rack will make you budge a foot's length ere you

know it. Wist you not his name? Come for my sake, if not your own.'

That argument prevailed, and the boy allowed himself to be led away.

'Clerivault,' he said presently, in a stiff strait voice, when they were come into a quiet place; 'you asked me but now if I knew him. I knew and know him, Clerivault.'

He stopped, looking full into the other's face, and said not another word. But there had been that of significance in his tone which was unmistakable. Clerivault dropped his eyes before that revelation of understanding.

'Well,' he muttered lamely: 'if you know him, you know what is better avoided. Once a bad man is always a bad man—that is a legal dictum. You will gain most by remembering it, and forgetting all the rest.'

But Brion, though he uttered no word further on the subject, did not forget. The shadow of that encounter darkened all the sunny days which had gone before, and made ominous even the delirious prospect which had lured him from his far retreat. Henceforth he could never feel himself secure from the chance of a meeting, to which accident, or his own hot young blood, might give a sinister turn.

CHAPTER XX

MISTRESS JOAN MEDLEY

'LUCIDUS ordo!' cried Raleigh. 'I drink to the happy sequel!'

He was as good as his word, and in enthusiastic measure. He was come at last, and sat with his young friend in a private room of the *Cock* tavern, as brilliant a figure as that dark wainscotting had ever been called on to enshrine. He lolled easily back, one leg crossed over the other, and lifted his cup high, gazing benevolently at the excited eager face of the boy, as it regarded him across the table. He had but just been describing his tactics, conceived and developed—with a rather unnecessary elaboration, Brion could not help but think—for the most romantic reception of a lover by his mistress. The lover had winced a little over the necessity of accepting any such outside means, however devoted, to the attainment of an end so sensitively personal; but he had to remember that it was he himself who, in the first instance, had volunteered the confidence; and in any case the enrapturing prospect silenced all scruples as to the methods of its evoking. He was to see Joan again, and that was ecstasy enough.

Raleigh had explained how he had gone to work to lead up to this ravishing consummation. He had got his friend, the 'certain popinjay' before mentioned, to carry him into Mistress Medley's own presence, on the score that he must satisfy himself as to the lady's

person and manners before he could presume to give him advice, while repudiating any suspicion the other might conceive as to his absolute disinterestedness in the matter; and, having once procured that introduction, had followed it up with a private visit to the heiress on his own account, which, with his name and reputation, and the glamour of the Court about him, was a thing very easily effected. And then, no sooner was that interview secured, than he had opened with all his arts upon his gentle hearer, first interesting, then exciting her mind on the subject of a dear friend of his—one who for the present must go nameless—who had seen her and been smitten to the heart, whose cause he pleaded with all the passionate eloquence at his command, and who craved, he said, but one brief meeting, that he might press a suit which, lacking the romantic atmosphere of night and secrecy, he must despair of ever urging with a hope to move her. In short, he had sped his plea so well, and with such imaginative enlargement of the case, making himself almost believe in his own picture, that the lady, much moved, had consented, after a show of reluctance, to see her unknown admirer that very night, and to admit him, by a private way—position and hour defined—to a short interview in the presence of a third party—which was the *lucidus ordo* acclaimed.

Now, in this transporting statement there were, nevertheless, an implication or so which jarred, just a thought, on its hearer's sensibilities. Brion did not, for one thing, quite see the necessity for all this elaborate secrecy in a matter which had been much more simply settled by the plain process of his friend's furnishing him with Joan's address, after having paved the way,

—if he so wished it, and as he had at first proposed—by a melting invocation to the spirit of a past and vanished passion. Still, that point he—suspecting, perhaps, by this time, something of the Captain's temperament, and knowing how men of his romantic complexion valued a love affair only in proportion as it was roundabout and complicated—was quite ready to waive. Another which, only half consciously, disturbed him more, was the thought of Joan, that artless child of his memory, permitting to the 'glamour of the Court', like any vulgar cit, familiarities which, in one of her own order, she might have resented; while yet a third turned upon the unquestionable fact that she could make a tryst with a gentleman who, for all she knew to the contrary, was utterly unknown to her.

But he extinguished all these misgivings, as rapidly as they flickered into his mind, and would have nothing of them, as disloyalties to his love. Perhaps she guessed; perhaps, even, she had heard of his friendship with Raleigh, and had formed her own conclusions as to the meaning of the promise won from her. That was a wonderful inspiration. He built upon it. He was to see his Joan again—there was the one solid splendid fact—and possibly to discover that he himself was the visitor she expected. And if his friend had brought this about by means that seemed to him unduly fanciful, he would not carp and be ungrateful if they were justified by such an end.

And in the meanwhile, time, place and procedure were all settled things, and he had only to wait and prepare himself against the blissful moment. It was arranged that Raleigh was to be at Westminster Stairs, with a party of his own fellows and his private barge,

at seven o'clock that same evening, and that Brion was to embark with them, and be pulled down the river to a certain point, where he was to land and follow the directions given him, while the others watched out his return by the waterside. He was very grateful for this arrangement and said so; it was a real act of kindness and self-sacrifice on the part of a friend so greatly in request as Master Walter; but why would not that friend give him the address offhand, so that he might achieve his own mission in his own way, without putting others to the trouble and tedium of seeing him through with the business?

But Raleigh only laughed. He would tell him nothing about the house; only that it was a merchant's house in a mercantile quarter—a very fine house, fitting to the position of such a civic dignitary as the late Sir John Medley—and that it was situated somewhere between Puddle Dock and London Bridge. Of course, said he, Master Middleton might easily, if he liked, and if he were minded to discard the advice of a friend, discover the house for himself, and present himself to its inmate in the ordinary way of civility; only, in that case, he would make bold to say, the enterprise would be robbed of all that romantic mystery which was ever a leading fascination in ladies' eyes, and from poetry would be reduced to the dullest prose. Whereat Brion, seeing they were on ticklish ground, very wisely withdrew the suggestion, with the assurance that he had only made it from a desire to save the other trouble, and that, convinced now of the truth, he wholly deferred to a judgment which had all the shrewd experience of a master in the art of philandering to back it.

'To the happy sequel!' responded he, with a great bright sigh; and drained his own mug to the toast.

'Is the patriot to be in the secret?' asked Raleigh.

Brion shook his head. 'He hath never heard our names coupled by me. Thou art the only one who knows of her, Walter.' He had been invited to that familiarity by the companionable soldier.

Raleigh looked pleased. 'Well,' said he, 'I'll not say I'm flattered till I've proved myself.'

'Walter'—his eyes desperately coaxed: 'you'll not tell me anything, I know.'

'Not a word.'

'Not of how she appeared to you?'

'She appeared to me walking on two feet, like any other woman.'

'Ah! but is she not beautiful?'

'Beauty, my friend'—he was drinking again, as if to avoid a direct encounter with the look which sought his—'is in the eyes which perceive it.'

'Well, did not yours perceive it?'

'I am not in love with her. From the child we find chief beauty in those we love.'

'How cold you are.'

'Discreet.'

'How spoke she?'

'With her lips and tongue—in the English language.'

'There you are wrong. It is love's own music.'

'It did not warble for me, i'faith.'

'Alack, you mean?'

'Alack, of course.'

'Well, I will question you no more.'

'I would not, for your mind's peace, since you will get nothing. What! appraise another man's mistress

to his face? Not I. She is Joan Medley: it is all summed up in that.'

It was for Brion. He spent a restless time, after the other had gone, waiting for the evening to come. He could settle to no occupation, but dawdled out the slow hours, feeling their length unbearable. He had informed Clerivault that he was for a jaunt with Captain Raleigh that night, but had not explained what there was in the prospect to make him so excited and impatient. His mood puzzled the good fellow; but since there was a sign in it of that imperious temper to which it was occasionally subject, he held his tongue, and obeyed all his directions without comment.

At last evening fell, and the young gentleman with it to a consideration of his toilet. He had never spent so much time and care over that in his life before, but had out all his suits—the gray with lace of silver tissue, the plum-colour slashed with white satin, the black velvet, and the steel blue with miniver—and debated them, deciding, after profound cogitation, upon the last, as the one in which, most fancying himself, he would most honour the occasion. His short hair then received his attention, and not less the short mustachio on his lip. He hung his rapier at his thigh; disposed his black velvet curtmanteau to the best effect on his left shoulder, cocked his black velvet bonnet, with the blue jay's feather and the blue beryl in it, at a telling angle, and, so arrayed, strode forth to conquer. And indeed he was a pretty figure, and one to mirror itself very alluringly in bright eyes.

He was early at the rendezvous, of course, and had to wait some minutes on the stairs before the barge appeared to take him off. But at length it hove out

of the shadows, and received him on board; and the great thrilling adventure was launched. They dropped down with the tide, so cautiously, for the night was cloudy and dark, that his impatience could scarce brook the delay; but, since 'all overs,' as the proverb saith, 'are ill, but over the water,' the happy end came at last, and at the moment when Brion was abandoning hope of any end at all. Raleigh gave a low order, and the men pulled in silently to a point on the shore he indicated. Here ran a stone slip into the water, descending from the gullet of a narrow lane where a dismal lantern hung and blinked, like a corpse-candle drowzy with watching. The shore was thick with a throng of houses, timbered and gabled, ghosts in the dim-lit darkness—great buildings some, and redolent of civic prosperity. Barges, piled with merchandise, slumbered at anchor in the stream. The roar of the waters under London Bridge droned in their ears, though the monster himself was invisible. It was a crowded, huddled settlement, with veins of the leanest cut through its substance to connect it with the great artery of Thames Street half a furlong away. They grounded on the slip, and, while a fellow leaped out to hold the boat's nose secure, Raleigh and his young friend disembarked, and climbed the slope to the level stones above.

'Where are we?' asked Brion, in a low voice.

'Dowgate,' answered the other—'a rich and prolific quarter. Yonder's the Steel yard, stronghold of the Hanse League. A murrain on them—German swine, crunching our good English acorns, in each of which might sleep the cradle of a lusty ship! But we've ringed their snouts of late, to limit their grubbing in our native soil, and give our own merchant adventurers

a chance. Better still were they all packed neck and crop out of the country.' He kicked at a barrel, an outlying one of many that littered the wharf hard by. 'We've let them rob us,' he growled, 'the while our tolerant courtesy hath passed for folly or weakness with these hogs it favoured; like as though some petted guest brazenly repaid his host by bearing off the silver plate he'd fed on, and was honoured for his treachery. God's truth! we can do our own trading, I hope, and farther, it may chance, than any Hanseatic shark can follow us. When that expedition of ours is launched——'

'We shall be over with to-night's business,' put in Brion. He was near dancing with impatience. What were all the sixty-six Hanse towns and their confederates to this one present corner of his own.

A distant bell struck the three-quarters. Raleigh laughed and exclaimed:—

'Cry you mercy, poor lover! Do you perish while I prose? Well, we are betimes, but not more than she in her impatience, I'll warrant. Come, now, and I'll set thee on thy way.'

He led the young man to the opening of the lane —which appeared as a mere channel furrowed through a field of houses—and, bidding him traverse it some fifty yards, take the first turning to the right, and knock at a door he should see on his dexter hand, where was carved a rebus of a hotchpot, signifying a medley of good things. The password was *speedwell*, said he; and so giving him his blessing, and urging him to make the best of his opportunity, and not consider his friend, who in such a cause was prepared to linger out the night by the water if need be, he thrust the lantern into his

hand, and, wishing him God-speed, went back to the boat.

Brion, his heart beating high, his feet seeming to step on air, entered the lane and walked on. Twenty yards in he heard a casement opened overhead, and, to a shrill cry of 'gardy-loo,' a pail of slops was emptied into the street. It fell behind, and only just missed him; but it doused his mood of exaltation as effectually as if it had made a foul wet clout of the blue and miniver. As he sped on, keeping as near the middle of the way as practicable, he thought of nothing else than a possible, and more catastrophic, repetition of the performance; and he was still agitated by the memory of it, when he found the door and took shelter under its overhanging penthouse.

But answer came soon enough to his cautious knock to ease his mind and justify Master Raleigh in his prediction: and there in the doorway stood a capacious dame, who seemed to regard him with curiosity before she spoke.

'How now, young man?' she said at last, in a voice half stifled behind walls of fat. 'What is your business here, an it please you?'

Her eyes were moist and lushy; her face was like a great red ham, with the little ruff about her neck for a frill to it; she leaned on a gold-knobbed cane, and for support, for she was corpulent and rheumatic.

'What all business wishes—to speedwell,' answered the youth, feeling, despite himself, a little shame in this masquerading.

She put a finger to her lips instantly, and, nodding and leering, made way for him to enter, and closed the door behind him.

'Leave your lantern there,' she whispered, and, waddling heavily before, with a little sighing groan or two, led him down a panelled passage into a room that opened from it, and, bidding him wait there till her return, shut him in and disappeared. He heard her going painfully and complainingly up the flight of stairs he had observed before him on entering, and waited glowingly for the abounding vision which was to signalize her return.

The room in which he found himself was bare and empty, but bore traces of some honoured occupation in the past history of the house. Its walls, though streaked and faded, had once been gilt, and on them rods for tapestry still rusted in their sockets. There was a noble carved stone fireplace, with a great hood roofing it, and dogs upon the hearth; but only a brazier burned there now, as if for the makeshift accommodation of some casual watcher. That and the single chair set before it, the only article of furniture in the place, saving a couple of tapers that flared in sconces on the wall, seemed to point to a vigil just kept in expectation of this particular visit. But kept by whom? Obviously by her who had answered to his knock, and who had been stationed here for that very purpose. The thought thrilled him through and through. For that very purpose! So, she had provided for the meeting as anxiously, with as great an excitement of expectation, as he had felt in speeding to it.

And almost with the thought he heard her coming. There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. 'Joan!' he breathed from his bursting heart—and the door on the moment opened, and she entered.

She came in on the arm of her governante, the blown

breathless old lady with the stick. She gave one bashful glance towards the stranger, then looked aside, with a little mincing shrug and wriggle of her shoulders. There was a pause, quite painful in its intensity. And then Brion opened his mouth and gasped out an inquiry:—

'Mistress Joan Medley?'

'The same, young man,' panted the governante, her voice wheezy from her exertions. 'What, young man, what, you speak as though you doubted! By'r lady, you should know her, it seems, better than she knows you. Come, whatever thy petition, speed with it, for she hath but a little time to spare thee.'

'Trudy!' murmured the young lady, in a tone of coquettish remonstrance.

Was she young? There was no telling. There are those—the fortunate ones, perhaps—who, looking like wizened age in youth, in age come to look youthful. What Brion saw before him was a little undersized creature, with a sharp unhealthy face and ferrety eyelashes. She was all hung and sown with gems, after the fashion of a royal model. Her head-dress was as monstrous as was her farthingale, over which a jewelled stomacher came down so deep as to give to her already short lower limbs an aspect of quite grotesque stubbiness. The red heels to her shoes were four inches in height; the vulgarity of tasteless wealth marked her all over; as a figurine in a gallanty show she might have passed, but as nothing akin to nature in all the world. She glanced up from under her pale lashes, wreathing and unwreathing her fingers, and so down again.

'You wished to see me, Sir,' she said, her shoulders

always in a state of convulsion. 'I am willing to hear what you have to say. Such a persuasive friend as you sent—O, dear, o'my conscience!'

Brion opened his mouth to speak; but not a word would come of it. He felt as if trapped—fairly confounded in a snare of his own setting. The old lady broke in impatiently:—

'Hey-day! a backward gallant on my word. What, to press a suit quotha! Here's not enough of "night and secrecy" for him mayhap. Well, there's a form of eloquence with some grows bolder as the lights go out. Hark ye, shy lover—there's privacy enow down here to suit an Abbot. Go to! I'll leave ye to your billings, pretty things, and shut the door, and hope to find your manners mended when I ope again.'

With a leer, and a little shake of her stick, she turned to put her threat into execution. Desperate with terror, Brion came to his wits, and took a quick step towards her.

'Stay, I prithee,' said he. 'There—there is a mistake.'

At the sound of the word the old woman stopped, and the younger one, her countenance changed, started and turned rigid.

'A mistake!' whispered she; and gave a little choke.

There was nothing for the unhappy young man but instant candour. He plunged for it, his face going scarlet.

'This is not the lady I expected.'

'Eh!' cried the governante violently—''Tis Mistress Joan Medley.'

'I cannot help it,' said Brion: 'It is not she I thought. O, I am a humbled wretch, craving absolution! How

the misconception arose I dare not think; some—some confusion in the name, belike; yet the blame shall be mine alone, and the full contrition. If I had had but one clue to the truth, I had not so come to shame myself, or insult an honoured lady to whose gracious condescension alone I am indebted for this interview. I entreat her to forgive me, and to permit me to withdraw from the presence I have offended, with a thousand apologies for a presumption which was never dreamed or purposed.'

The governante looked from one fallen face to the other, and an ineffable leer came into her own.

'Well, well,' said she: 'You're here; and there she is who knew and knows you not from Adam. What then? If a tree is sweet and fruitful, it may be loved without a name. She's content, if you are, to accept you on your merits. Go to: Take what Fortune brings you, and make no words about it. There's many a cross scent followed ends in tastier game than that that was first pursued and missed.'

Brion did not answer, but panicstruck he shook his head and made for the door. He was halted by a sudden screech, followed by a torrent of vituperation:—

'Base and perfidious! How dare you, Trudy, how dare you, I say—to deal with me thus, to answer for me thus, before a common rogue and impostor, in whose face I had detected the low villainy even before he spoke. Content! His merits! I'd sooner touch a toad.' Her shred of a body heaved and stormed, threatening to burst its laces; her face was a very spectre of rageful spite. 'And you—to encourage him, that lewd and pernicious enormity—to let him to think I craved his base attentions—a common groom—I,

I, that could choose among a hundred of his masters —I'll have him followed and exposed. I'll have him scourged at the cart-tail, while *she* looks on—the one he dared to think me—the one——'

She was gasping hysterically to an end. It came in a wind of tears, and she dropped into the chair by the hearth. Brion, appalled a moment, the next took his discretion in hand and bolted. He found his lantern yet burning, seized it, opened the door with agitated fingers, and, leaping into the night, closed it behind him. And then he ran—ran as if the devil were at his heels, and never stopped until he had reached the barge and jumped aboard.

'Put off, a God's name!' said he. 'I'm winded.'

Raleigh, who had been sitting wrapped in his cloak and half asleep in the sternsheets, greeted him with some surprise :—

'So soon! Was not the lady kind?'

'Hardly.'

'Not kind?'

'It was the wrong lady—that was all.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE DECOY

'ARE there two Joan Medleys in the world; and both——'

Brion stopped, and fell into such a deep and frowning reverie that the Captain would not venture to break into it for a while, but sat sipping his mulled wine, and glancing from time to time, with a curious amused expression, at the absorbed young figure. They were back at the *Cock*, and drinking a *night-cap* in company.

'You do not,' said Raleigh at last, seeing the other stir, 'blame me for this fiasco?'

Brion shook a disconsolate noddle.

'I blame nobody. We are victims all, in different degree. But of what or whom?'

Seeing him inclined to a fresh fit of abstraction, Raleigh put in hastily:—

'Well, now it is resolved, I will confess it seemed to me an infatuation passing strange, and accountable to nothing, unless it were the worship of a golden idol. But there I wronged thee, and do ask thy pardon for it.'

'What else could you think? Yet, thy romantic mystery, forsooth, and poetry reduced to prose! O, God mend us all! Why would you not tell me how she looked to you?'

'Looks are like gospels, for each to construe according to his faith. Had my interpretation differed from yours, you'd ha' damned me for a heretic.'

'But to dream I could have thought *that* beautiful!'

His expression was so dismayed that Raleigh, after a vain attempt to control himself, went into a shout of laughter.

'Well——' began Brion; and his face quivered, and in a moment he was shaking too.

'This riddle,' said the soldier presently, gasping himself into sobriety—'we must seek the clue to it.'

But on that Brion, returning to an instant seriousness, put a definite veto.

'No further,' said he. 'I prithee from this moment let the whole question drop. I say it with all earnestness, and do entreat thee to let it rest as final.'

The other nodded: 'Well, if you wish it'—and at that moment Clerivault, coming in with a faggot to lay on the embers, ended the discussion.

'Signor Clerivault,' said Raleigh, 'is not beauty, in your opinion, a question of taste?'

Clerivault, depositing the log in its place, came frigidly upright.

'I have no claim to a foreign title, Sir.'

'I should have said Master.'

The paragon bowed stately:—

'Sir, how taste?'

'Why, thus. I call a woman beautiful: another shakes his head. His eyes cannot see it; mine do. Therefore her beauty is not intrinsically in her, but in mine eyes. There is no standard to judge by.'

'There would be no beauty, Sir, if there were. Eternal conformation to a rigid model would make very deformity desirable by contrast.'

'Very true'—he showed an inclination to chuckle—'I think some of us feel that. It is human to like

change—even to pursue it on occasion to extremes. The loveliest of her sex will sometimes attach herself to the most repulsive of ours—and vice versa, it may hap. Hast ever been in love with a monstrosity yourself, Master Clerivault?'

'Nay, not so far, Sir, not so far.' He lifted his chin, handling his throat as if he traced its contours luxuriously. 'Yet I may have felt—I do not say—the lure—what I may call the fascination of abnormity.'

'Instance, instance!'

'Hem! It was in the days—but all's one for that. My quarters—no matter for what occasion—were at Dunster, one side the British Channel; and hers on the opposite shore. She had a siren voice—I'll say so much—and sang me with it daily across the water.'

'A siren fog-horn rather. Well, you took boat and back—daily?'

'No, I swam.'

'My God! Fifteen miles if a yard. And back, too. A very quintuple Leander.'

'Not back.'

'O, not back! You disappoint me.'

'Why, Clerivault!' cried Brion, aghast over this enormous invention. 'You cannot swim but a yard or two, and that with one foot on the bottom. Have I not seen you floundering in the Dart?'

'Fresh water, Sir, fresh water. There's no comparison between fresh water and salt. In certain seasons of the brine 'tis just to lie and paddle.'

'Or to lie and not paddle,' said Raleigh.

He loved this creature, loved to *draw* him, whether for vanity or inspiration. It was all fruit, he saw, of the same quality of imagination, and had within it

for eternal condonation the living kernel of truth and loyalty.

He spoke to him, chancing across him a day or two later, on the subject of his young master's obduracy in a certain matter. Raleigh had urged his friend to make his début at Court under his aegis, promising him a favourable reception. His youth and gallant bearing, he said, would be his certain passports to notice and advancement. It was a kind insistence, and generous on the part of one whose interests were not in creating rival fetiches; but he had conceived a great affection for the boy, and really wished him well.

But Brion had declined, with every courtesy, the proffered service. He refused to give reasons; called it a question of sentiment; declared he had no wish to be a Courtier, and was generally as obstinate as a young mule, impervious to any persuasion but that of his own inclinations. The Captain was a little hurt, and when he ran across Clerivault, expatiated on the opportunity his master was deliberately throwing away, and urged him to exert *his* influence over him to persuade him to a reconsideration of the proposal. But, to his surprise, Clerivault supported the other in his resolution. He declared, with emphasis, that he thought he had decided rightly, and that he, for his part, would certainly do nothing to dissuade him from his determination. And then, being pressed, he gave his reasons, only developing the truth to one who was already in possession of the gist of it :—

'How accident,' said he, 'brought him to knowledge of his parentage is a true story but a past one. Let it suffice, Sir, that he knows, and eke is bitter hostile

to one author of his invalidity, and that not the dead one. His blood is proud and hot, and I should dread beyond measure their meeting. No, he's better from Court—' and he told Raleigh of the little contretemps the day the Queen went a'hawking, and of Brion's gesture of hate and repulsion, and of how he had been in terror ever since of some evil befalling his charge.

The Captain bent his brows over the recital. It was true he had not guessed of this knowledge of Brion's, and it altered the case for him. It might affect—perhaps he debated, if there were truth in the report of his cordial relations with a certain great nobleman—his own favoured position, and evoke animosity where had been friendship.

'Well, on the whole,' said he, 'mayhap he is right, and thou, excellent servitor'—and from that time he made no other attempt to shake the young man's resolution.

But the fear of some catastrophe still nervously abode with Clerivault, in spite of that confidence now shared with a sympathetic and influential friend, and he was never easy when the young man was out of his sight. He would follow him like his shadow; impose himself on him uninvited in a way that presently drove Brion to rebellion, and later to exasperation. He had no need, he said, to go in leading-strings to a male nurse; he had the wit to find his own way about, and a preference, on occasion, for his own company above any other that might attach itself to him. He was not always kind in the way he vented his irritability on the poor fellow. But Clerivault uttered no complaint; he took all rebuffs with a stoical impassibility, indifferent to wounds received in what his

duty told him was an indispensable service. He had not, it is true, the clue to one motive inclining his young master to fits of restless moodiness, in which he desired to be, and wander, alone. Since the night of that absurd but rather shattering escapade a sense of some disaster threatening a long cherished ideal had haunted Brion's mind like a secret shadow. He would stoutly deride its menace, would refuse to admit or analyse it, but it remained there all the time, and he could not throw off the consciousness of its possession. His faith had been shaken, and in a very unpalatable manner. That shrill and vulgar little termagant seemed to have blown away at a blast all that sentiment which had wafted him on wings of rapture towards an imagined goal. The whole thing was cheapened and vulgarised. A sense of his own credulous folly, of the necessity of eschewing for the future all such illusive enthusiasms, and setting worldly wisdom in their place, gripped and resolved him. He must rise from this time superior to the rather exotic romanticism which for so long had affected his outlook, and must become that independent and self-reliant entity which practical manhood demanded. Hence his impatience of supervision.

'No, my friend,' he said one morning, turning on the faithful watch-dog who was about to follow him out: 'I need no escort, by your leave.'

'No question of need, Sir, but of sociability,' answered Clerivault sweetly. 'You may favour your own company more than I do mine.'

'I do for the nonce. I would be alone, my good fellow. You hear?'

'With difficulty, Sir. I am dull o' the lug this morning. I shall hear better in the fresh air.'

'Clerivault, I would not have us quarrel.'

'God forbid!'

'I say God forbid.'

'May I not follow, even at a distance?'

'To stick in my thoughts like a pursuing conscience! No, stay where you are. I shall be back anon.'

The man looked after him wistfully as he disappeared; but Brion's mood had been so peremptory that he dared not disobey. He only groaned and shook his head, as he turned back into the yard from which the other had gone forth. As he did so, he was passed by a stranger who had risen hastily from drinking a mug of ale at one of the tables hard by, and who also vanished through the archway leading into the street.

Brion, loitering eastward, was aware of some excite ment in the town. A press of people, all moving his way, gathered volume as he advanced. He asked the reason of a neighbour, and was told that Her Majesty was to go that morning in state to Paul's Cross to hear a notable Reformer preach. He pushed on, and somewhere beyond the Palace gained a position in the crowd whence, obscurely situated himself, he could see the procession pass. He had no desire to risk a second meeting at close quarters with the man from whom, of all souls in the teeming city, he felt the most alienated and apart.

He had not long to wait before a vast blare of horns announced the Queen's coming. She was preceded by a great company of halberdiers, on whose heels followed a band of drummers and trumpeters, a little army in number, from whose hundreds of instruments arose—for Her Majesty liked her music strong—a shattering din which tore the very air into tatters.

Thereafter appeared a company of morris dancers, men and girls, in full beribboned panoply—Maid Marian, Morisco, Franciscan friar and the lot—all reeling and capering and intertwining as they flowed on with the procession, of which the very next instalment was Her Grace herself, a gorgeous idol in a gorgeous palanquin, borne on the shoulders of six high gentlemen of the Court, and smiling on her good people as she passed. Before the litter walked my Lord Hunsdon, carrying the sword of State, and beside and behind it thronged an immense train of lords and ladies on foot, every one bareheaded and resplendent in velvet and satin and flashing jewels. To these again succeeded soldiers, a full thousand of them and divided into companies, between which came rumbling behind their prancing teams no less than ten great pieces of ordnance, whose purpose was peaceful display, while, to finish all, a couple of great white bears in shining collars, ten keepers holding by gilded chains to each collar, shuffled out the climax, their heads hanging, their red tongues lolling, their eyes smouldering helpless animosity.

It was a stupendous exhibition; yet Brion found himself wondering what connexion it could possibly have with the pious object which had evoked it. Perhaps the morris dancers might have found precedent in the dance of David before the Ark; but what of the cannon and the bears? There was nothing of ritual about them. He was forced to the conclusion that when Her Majesty had a mind for an impressive display of herself—which was not infrequently the case—the nearest pretext was made to serve her purpose.

Well, he watched it all go by, and without distinguishing

amid the glittering mob the person of him he least desired to look on; and, being satisfied with what he had seen, extricated himself from the crowd, and turned into one of the side lanes which led down to the river. He had hardly entered it, when he heard himself accosted from behind, and turned to see a breathless stranger addressing him.

'Master Middleton, if I may venture the surmise?'

He was sallow and lank-featured, with an air of such nervous hurry about him that his voice shook in putting the question. He wore a dark cloak huddled about his shoulders, as if he were cold, and the slouch of his hat barely allowed his eyes to be seen. Brion bowed, wondering.

'I carry a message from a friend of yours,' said the stranger quickly—'one Clerivault. He wished me to say that he followed you, despite your desire, and, having observed where you stood among the crowd, was able to give me directions, together with a description of your person, which led to this fortunate encounter. Your friend, I regret to say, has met with a mishap, and asks you to come to him.'

The frown which, on Brion's face, had greeted the first part of this sentence, was changed to a look of pallor and alarm at the end.

'Clerivault! Hurt!' said he. 'O! where is he?'

'He has been carried into a house,' said the stranger. 'I will show you where. It is not a stone's throw away.'

They went off at a race together, down the very lane they were in. It was a mere deserted wynd, sunk like a deep ravine in a hill of gloomy stone. As he hurried on, the young man put an agitated question:—

'How hurt? You did not say.'

'A moment,' said the stranger, stopping. 'You will see for yourself in a moment.'

They had come to an iron-studded door set in the blank wall of a great building, and with a couple of steps leading up to it. The stranger took the steps at a bound, and knocked on the door. It was opened immediately, and he beckoned Brion to mount and follow. The boy, an easy prey in his excitement and inexperience, complied, unsuspecting. The moment he was in, the door slammed to behind him with a noise of thunder, which seemed to reverberate through adjacent halls; and darkness, profound after the sunshine of the streets, rushed upon him like a blinding night. He stood paralysed a moment, and then, 'Where am I?' he said aloud, groping out with his hands. And even in the act, as if he had proffered those for manacling, they were seized on either side in an iron grip, and he knew himself a prisoner to some unknown power. He gave a little gasp—he was only a boy, after all—struggled a little; and then, feeling the futility of his efforts, resigned himself to what Fate might develop.

'That's wise,' said a gruff low voice in his ear. 'Twenty to one's too great odds for even a gentleman game cock, young master.'

CHAPTER XXII

A POIGNANT INTERVIEW

Slowly, as in a theatre, when dark veils are lifted one by one to simulate a gradual dawn, before Brion's eyes, as they accustomed themselves to the gloom, came into shadowy being the shapes and forms about him. He stood, he saw, in a low vaulted chamber, a score of armed men surrounding him and the two who held him captive. Narrow shafts ran up into the groining of the roof, against one of which lolled he who had spoken in his ear, and who appeared to be the captain of the party. His conductor had disappeared—presumably to notify some one of his seizure—and silence and stagnation prevailed, pending, it seemed, the messenger's return. The occasional clearing of a throat or the shuffle of a foot on the stone flags were the only sounds to break the dead stillness. Somewhere in front of him, and above the level of his eyes, a vertical line of silver, the merest thread, seemed to denote the presence of heavy curtains, shrouding the way into the inner recesses of the house; and on that line he fixed his attention.

He had made one attempt to break the silence, and had been roughly bidden by the officer to hold his tongue or he would be incontinently gagged. And so he stood mute, but raging in his heart over the damnable treachery which had been used to draw him into this snare. His one grain of comfort lay in Cleri-

vault's safety. Of that he was now convinced: the story had been devised, he saw, merely to entrap and secure him—how devised, with what intention and on what information, it were idle to speculate. He knew enough of the man into whose clutches, he never had a doubt, he had fallen, to know that he never lacked for agents and abettors in any sinister business he had on hand. But, for all that, it was nothing less than his own vanity and headstrong will which were responsible for this trouble. Clerivault had foreseen truly, and he had flouted in his conceit the faithful seer. Like a child he had blundered into the trap, and now he must pay the penalty for his obstinate folly —with what?

It was that thought which most maddened him—his real simplicity, and the self-sufficiency which had made it vulnerable to a blatant imposture. His passion rose with his sense of humiliation. Was no course left to him but submission to the unknown force which held him here imprisoned? Better the risk of a dash for freedom than a surrender so spiritless.

The door by which he had entered was behind him. Barred and bolted, there was no hope of escape that way. But—what the curtains hid—if he could once gain the intricacies of the house beyond!

He had been standing so passive as to lull his guards into a sense of false security, and the rigour of their hold on his arms had a little relaxed itself in consequence. He was as lithe and muscular as a young leopard. With a sudden leap and wrench he tore himself free and, before they could recover from their surprise, was bounding for the thread of light. He gained this small advantage, that in the dusk, and the

confusion of the general rush to recapture him, he had time, before he was beset, to draw his sword; but he could do no more, since an obstacle he had not foreseen, in the shape of a short flight of steps leading to the curtains, baulked and brought him to bay. He laid one fellow's cheek open with his blade; but he had no play in the crush for his sword arm, and could only shorten his weapon and stab ineffectively, as, feeling for the steps with his heels, he essayed to mount them backwards one by one. The noise was at its height—the scuffle of feet, the clash of steel, the calling of the officer to his men to take him alive o' God's name, and do him no hurt on peril of their heads—when the curtains at Brion's back parted, letting in a faint gush of light, and with it the apparition of a white panic-struck face. The boy glanced round, saw the beast who had entrapped him, and, with a mighty effort and a cry of rage, leapt the remaining step and fell tooth and nail upon his enemy. The man went down under him with a yelp like a bitten dog's, and lay writhing. But the end was come. Before the youngster could seize his blade into position, the whole party was upon him, and he was severed from his prey and set, torn and dishevelled on his feet, his sword wrested from him and his arms bound behind his back. And there he stood, panting and scornful, jeering at the pitiful figure of the other, as they set him too, shaking like a jelly, upright.

'See the meal-faced pitcher-bawd,' cried he, 'how his valour fits with his profession!'

There was a stifled laugh or two, and the man, casting a fell venomous look about him, made a mute gesture to the others to follow, and went on himself before. The curtain had been torn aside in the fracas, revealing

a narrow dim-lit passage down which the whole party made its way, the prisoner held secure in its midst. But Brion had no further thought to escape, and, breathed and defenceless as he was, allowed himself to be carried along unresisting.

Deep into the bowels of the building, like the passage tunnelled in a pyramid, ran the corridor, until at length it opened into a lofty stone hall, octagonal in shape, and having a peaked timbered roof with coats of arms emblazoned in its triangles, at whose apex an iron lantern, caging rather than releasing the little daylight which sought to enter and explore the glooms beneath, just enabled it to dilute their melancholy, and to reveal in each of the eight sections of the wall a heavy curtain hanging, denoting the presence of a room beyond.

Before one of these curtains the guard halted their prisoner, while the decoy, cringing and fulsome, parted the folds and vanished within. A muffled wrath of words followed, and presently the white face of the creature reappeared, and he whispered, his breath fluttering, in the Captain's ear. That officer grunted, and gave an order to his men :—

'Stand by till I call.' He turned to Brion : 'Now, young Sir '—and, taking him by one of his bound arms, led him into the room. The curtain closed behind them.

It was no great chamber—a spacious closet might describe it—but rich beyond the wont in its appointments. There was a Turkey carpet on the floor; another, inventoried by that name, on the table—'of crimson velvet, richly embroidered with my Lord's posie, bears and ragged staves of clothe of goulde and

silver, garnished upon the seames and aboute with goulde lace, fringed accordinglie, and lyned with crimson taffeta sarsenett.' And on it stood a flagon of hammered gold, from which, it seemed, my Lord had just drunk. The walls were panelled, and set in their darkness like a gem was a portrait of the Queen by Zucchero. From the ceiling hung a brazen candelabrum, with many branches. The chairs were upholstered in crimson velvet, and on one of them, drawn up before the hearth, on which a fire of sea-coal burned, sat the expected figure of him whom out of all the world Brion had most wished to avoid, yet whom, it seemed, in some fateful way, he was most destined to encounter. Yet, since it was his destiny, he set his neck stiffly to it, and faced his captor with a look of proud defiance.

The soldier, staying his convoy within some three yards distance of this brooding figure, put his heels together with a click and saluted. At the sound, my Lord brought his chair about, a little labouredly, and setting his hands on his thighs, looked hard and curiously into the face of the boy before him. Steady as a rock, Brion returned the gaze. 'I will know him, now I see him,' he thought.

He was in his fiftieth year, burly, short-necked and nearly bald. His complexion was colourless; his strong eyebrows, mustachio and full spade beard were as black, whether from nature or artifice, as black ink. He had a black velvet bonnet on his head, and the suit he wore might have been the dark-man's livery. He looked a figure cut out of jet and ivory. Under the impassivity of his expression seemed to lurk a fierce and watchful arrogance, in the wings of his aquiline nose, in the pupils of his eyes, which were

more often turned towards this ear or the other than set forthright in their sockets. Like a suspicious dog he appeared to listen with eyes and ears together, while his head was held as stiff as pride. His voice came hoarse and ruttish, rumbling in his throat, when he spoke at last:—

'How now, boy! Are these your manners, being invited to my house to fall upon my servants and beat and maltreat them?'

'Such an invitation,' answered Brion, 'as the fowler lures his quarry withal. For my manners, not being framed on falsehood and cozenage, they were not made to please you.'

His boldness seemed to strike a very stillness in the room, so tense that one could hear, as it were, the Captain's skin pricking. Leicester's expression did not change or move, but his nostrils flickered, and sudden lamps seemed turned up in his eyes.

'So?' he said softly: 'a spirited retort; yet wise, in the circumstances?—Well, we'll question. Dost know me—who I am?'

'Too well, indeed.'

'Too well, yet not well enough, I'll venture, or some thought of peril might come to sing in you a milder note.'

'I have that thought,' said Brion. 'I should be a fool not to.'

'Ah! You have that thought—and, mayhap, the guilty conscience that fathered it?'

'I miss your meaning.'

'I think not. Confess your design; make a clean breast of it; and perchance—I'll not say; but certain considerations may weigh with me—your peril may be less.'

'Will you tell me my design? I have known of none, but to avoid where I could the very thought and sight of you.'

'Wherefore you waited me in a public place, and dared, you young presumptuous fool, to make public manifestation of your feelings. What, you'd show your high displeasure, would you!'

He rocked a little, back and forth, his lip lifting.

'I waited you not,' answered Brion, undaunted. 'That meeting—it was the last from my desire. Methinks, had I foreseen it, I had never come to London.'

'Better for you, sirrah, an you had not, nor listened to the flattering persuasions of a crafty counsellor: better had you stayed in your rustic obscurity, satisfied, with that old besotted rogue, your kinsman, to risk the penalties for recusancy, than run the deadlier peril of a throw with me. Ah, that opens your eyes! You did not guess, maybe, the range of my knowledge, when you complotted to discredit me.'

'With whom? But what is the use to ask. I have plotted with no one—been guilty of no design against your credit. As to my feelings, I cannot control my instincts, nor would not if I could. For my kinsman, who loved and cherished me, when those who had owed me all disclaimed their debt, he is no rogue—I throw the slander in your teeth. It is worthy of one whose range of knowledge works through such vile means and instruments as have been used to-day to trap an unsuspecting boy. Belike it was he, that same lying reptile, that informed you of how I fell away that morning on seeing you. The action was of repulsion—in itself a convincing witness to any but a fawning

pickthank. A plotter, methinks, had concealed his feelings more than I did.'

Again, in the silence that succeeded this hot outburst, it was as if the Captain's nerves vibrated audibly in his body. Awaiting the certain consequences of such mad temerity, he stole a significant glance at his lord, and saw in the intolerant face an expression which both startled and perplexed him. There was some obstupefaction in it, but not the fury he had expected. Instead, interest, curiosity, a suggestion of some faint and hard-held emotion, seemed to battle there for ascendancy or suppression. Yet the words that followed, though not what he had looked for, were sneering enough :—

'So innocent and yet so fearful! So guiltless a conscience, and yet that thought of peril! They hardly consort, according to my mind.'

The boy gave a curt laugh.

'Decoyed hither by a lie, fallen upon and bound, my weapon taken from me; above all the character of him that holds me helpless in his power—it were unnatural for me, were it not, to dream of any harm designed me in such circumstances? Well, do your work. I understand so much of it that I am not a pleasant reminder in your eyes.'

'Ha! I will not ask of what.'

'I would not.'

'For your disarming, you brought it on yourself.'

'Would I had killed thine informer first.'

'And so, with thy bloody sword, on me!'

Brion looked steadily into the eyes of him that spoke it.

'O!' he said softly: 'not upon *her* son, but upon you, be charged that black unnatural thought.'

Leicester started ever so slightly, moved uneasily in his seat, looked away, and again at the upright figure before him.

'Thou hast a bold spirit, boy,' he said harshly.

'Would I could trace it to a better source,' answered Brion.

'Thou——' he looked for a moment as if he had received a blow; then again his expression changed. 'Unbind him, Granton,' he said.

The soldier loosed the cord, setting the prisoner free. Leicester pointed to the curtain. 'Within call,' said he. 'I'll trust him.'

Granton disappeared, and the two were left alone together. The moment that was so, their eyes met in steady challenge.

'I might answer,' said my lord, in a low voice, 'would I could trace my better self therein.' He seemed to ponder on the face before him in a darkly brooding way. 'So,' he said, 'you would not kill me?'

He received no answer but the same steadfast look, nor seemed to expect one.

'Nor,' he added, 'design me any evil?'

'I have told you,' was the reply, 'my sole design is and ever has been to forget you live.'

Again a silence ensued, until suddenly Leicester spoke again :—

'What is your purpose, tell me, in seeking to be introduced at Court?'

'I do not seek.'

'What ! it was not for that you were persuaded to leave your retreat?'

'So far from it that the knowledge of your presence

there had made me reject such an offer though a thousand times more pressed.'

'So, it was pressed?'

'In a way—good-humouredly.'

'By whom?'

'By one that would do me a service—a friend.'

'And me a dis-service, perchance?'

'Your name was never mentioned between us, nor so much as thought on, by him, I'll swear.'

'How know you what was in his heart?'

'I know something of his heart. It is a fine and generous one, incapable of perfidy. Besides, why should he think of you in this connexion of his offer, or suspect the truth? Be sure I have not told it him, nor any. I am not so enamoured of it. I protested I would not be a courtier; and he was fain to let it rest at that, ceasing to importune me when he saw I was resolved; implying I might be right—that it was no great matter after all—as indeed it was not.'

Believing what he said, he spoke with obvious sincerity—enough to convince even the dark suspicious nature of him that listened, and who had put these questions—with what intent?

Was a corner of the veil here lifted? Hardly enough for Brion to gather more than a faint surmise of what lay behind. Yet the whole truth, if revealed, had seemed a pitiful enough thing to be clothed in such a giant's robe of artifice. It turned upon one, grown old as his time judged age, and by reason of his years, perhaps, and their disqualifying ravages, become sensible of a loosened hold on those royal affections he had once commanded. It turned upon the thought of an infidelity committed in long past days, and never

suspected by her who, thinking their then mutual faith inviolable, would bitterly resent that lost illusion, and visit his deception on his head in terms of final estrangement, finding therein a pretext for ridding herself of what, one might suspect, already a little irked her. It turned upon this pretty witness to his faithlessness—never, indeed, lost wholly sight of—and how at a late day his sin had come home to roost in him, and how it might be used by designing enemies to bring about his ruin. It turned upon all such considerations far more than upon any real suspicion that a vengeful spirit in this young victim of his wrongdoing nursed designs upon his life; though that thought, too, had been weighed and balanced. And now—was he reassured? He believed so. The boy's scornful repudiation of him was the best evidence in his favour, and it was for that very reason that he had suffered his young defiance and forgiven him his insolence. Had it been otherwise, had his suspicion been in any way confirmed, he would have disposed of him as ruthlessly and remorselessly as he would of any alien conspirator snared into his hands. But now, being reassured, and at liberty to consider him for himself, and not for his imagined designs, a certain emotion, weak and obscure, strange even to himself, but quite genuine in its nature, allowed itself a little room in his breast for play. The eyes which had scorned him, the spirit which had defied, became notes for admiration. They reflected credit on himself; he felt a pride in them; he had a sudden wish to stand well with the boy.

And Brion? He neither guessed, nor was ever to know, the secret motives which had underlain this interrogation. That this man suspected him of scheming

in some diabolical way against his life and fortunes was the one apparent thing; and with that explanation of a mystery he must rest content. He had no heart or wish, indeed, to inquire further; he wanted only, as he had himself truthfully declared, to put him for ever out of his mind.

A long time Leicester sat gazing into the young undaunted face, as if striving to recall some memory from it. At length he sighed and spoke :—

'Shall I believe thee? Well, sith thy truth unflatters me, I will believe it truth. Yet fain would I learn what brought thee to London, and in that company?'

'I shall not tell you what.'

'Rash and headstrong! Bethink you what you say.'

'I do, and say it. I shall not tell you. What brought me was no thought of you, nor anything concerning you. Have I not said it? I am not so proud of this connexion that I wish to vaunt it. To deny it, rather, since I had no voice in it. Be assured of that. It shall never be betrayed for me.'

'Nor shall word to living soul of this interview—eh —an I let thee free?'

'That follows—though I give my promise, if you will.'

'Ah!' He put his hands on the elbow of his chair, preparing to rise. 'Well, thou hast been in peril—believe me. That thou hast escaped it, thank her whose trustful spirit looks from out thine eyes. For thy rash insolence—I forgive it.' He got heavily to his feet, went forth and back once or twice in a narrow space, and stopped before the young man.

'Why will you hate me?' he said.

'Have I much reason to love?' answered Brion, his voice yielding a little.

'So you do hate me?'

'Hate connotes harm. I would not harm you, before God.'

'Will you—for her sake—call me once by that name your duty owes me?'

The boy shook his head. Something rose in his throat, hard as he struggled to resist it. 'I could not,' he whispered.

Leicester turned away, without a word. He stood looking down upon the glowing hearth.

'It may chance, boy,' he said, in a voice so strange and moving in such a man that it seemed to betray one secret of his influence over impressionable hearts —'that you judge me too harshly. That I risked greatly where I loved may be no condonation of my fault, yet at least it may testify to the wholeness of my devotion. For my wrong to thee, I regret it. Since there is no remedy, I will say no more. I could take pride in thee, but I may not. It is better we should never meet again. Go, and for her sake remember me as kindly as thou mayst. Call Granton hither.'

But Brion did not at once obey. Pride and emotion fought within him for mastery; his breast heaved; a moisture had sprung to his eyes. Suddenly, with an impulsive movement, he lifted the other's unresisting hand, and kissed it once gently, and gently put it from him. Then he turned, and went hurriedly to the door, and beckoned to the Captain, who stood with his men in the hall. The soldier strode to the summons.

'Granton,' said his lord, without turning his head, 'restore this youth his sword, and let him free. He is my friend, Granton.'

And so it was that Brion, a man escaped from a

deadly hazard, yet keeping for ever in his mind the picture of that tragic hour, the gloomy building and the room set like a lustrous shrine in its midst, found himself once more in the free and open street, an exultation at his heart, but also a wistful pain. That, in a measure, was never to leave him; yet even so it was as balsam on an ancient wound, the amelioration of one hurt by another. And, since it was so, his spirit henceforth felt a certain peace which it had never yet quite known. If he had lost something, he had gained no less in compensation.

He went straight back to his inn; and surely the sun had never shone so bright to him nor the air breathed so sweet. He found Clerivault pacing the yard, restless and uneasy, and was moved to remorse hearing the enormous sigh of relief with which that good creature greeted his return. It touched his humbled vanity to the quick. He answered to it, his eyes shining :—

'Hast thou so felt my truancy, then?'

'No matter what I have felt, sir,' was the reply, 'since you are here again. I would be no man's pursuing conscience, I.'

'You are; you were, Clerivault. The figure of you dogged my ungrateful heels.'

'On my honour, Sir, I have not moved from here, as you bade me.'

'I know it, good heart. I spoke but metaphorically. I was a thankless ingrate—for the last time, where thy love is in question, I do hope. Forgive me, Clerivault.'

'Forgive thee!' The man lifted his arms and eyes to heaven as if in mute ecstatic protest. 'Forgive my balm, my solace, my one friend? Say it again, sweetheart. I could kiss thy very shadow for that word!'

CHAPTER XXIII

HOME AGAIN

HAD his fears in any degree been justified? That disquieting suspicion may have just entered Clerivault's mind, seeking for the clue to some connexion between his young master's mental and material conditions. Something, it was evident, had torn and dishevelled that gentleman's attire, as something had disturbed his moral equilibrium. The good fellow's uneasiness was so great that he could not forbear significantly drawing Brion's attention to the state of his clothes. The youngster laughed.

'A brawl, Clerivault,' said he. 'I lacked my Mentor for the occasion. That is enough admitted, by your leave. Methinks, all said, I have had sufficient of London for one time, and incline to our good Devon again. What say you?'

What, indeed, but a most relieved acquiescence? He was glad to the heart to find his charge so minded —so glad that he was content to let the other question lapse in the joy of the near prospect of being rid of its burdensome responsibility.

And Brion himself? In truth the novel interests which this enterprise had brought him were small compensation for the emotional experiences he had had to suffer in their course. London, for all her promise, had given him but derision and disappointment—a hate, perhaps, dispelled, but a bright illusion darkened;

a new serenity won, but an old sorrow made more sorrowful. Yes, he was better back among his moors and streams and lonely hills.

One day before they left they rode over to Clapham to pay a visit, which the young man reproached himself with having already delayed to make too long. Yet that visit, too, when accomplished, proved a sorrow and a disappointment. More than eight years had passed since he had ridden, an anxious, unhappy boy, from the gates of the home which for so long time had protected and sheltered him; and now reapproaching it, and recalling its familiar environments, his heart was wonderfully moved with the thought of all that that ancient affection had meant for him. He had heard little of the family during the interval. A letter or two, in the early days of the severance, had passed —one, a little billet, in sedate language and misshapen script, from baby Alse—but with the soon cessation of that small correspondence all association with his former intimates seemed ended. He did not know who was to blame: nobody, perhaps, but only circumstance, in a day of difficult communications. But anyhow such was the case; and he was riding now, with a feeling of strange emotion, to take up what severed ties?

Alas! on the very threshold of his expectations a cruel rebuff awaited him. The old school-house was in its place, but with other tenants, and with all its most familiar features improved out of recognition. He learned the facts from those who lived there. The good old untidy Dame, so improvident yet so lovable, so busy yet so unbusinesslike, was dead these many years; the boys, Gregory and Richard, were, the one,

in an attorney's office at Bristol, the other, a clerk at Oxford; the ex-Divine himself, burdened with years, and much reduced in circumstances since his scholars had gradually deserted him with his faculties, lived with his only daughter, now grown a comely young woman, in a humble way in a small domicile near the church.

Sorry at heart, Brion sought and found them there. It was indeed a modest tenement, but bright and clean —one of a little group standing almost against the walls of the old church of which the poor man himself had been at one time vicar. He hardly knew his former ward and pupil; seemed lost in the little woes and selfishnesses of senility, on which his daughter waited with a grave and patient motherliness which was very pretty and touching. She had grown out of Brion's memory—not he out of hers. She seemed to measure him with her candid gray eyes, shyly, but with no lack of self-possession. He thought he read a quiet rebuke in them, read in her manner a pride of gentle repulse of an interest which years of so long neglect made little better than an effrontery. Such was his impression, though she may have meant nothing of the sort. She took him, by his own wish, to see her mother's grave in the churchyard hard by, and watched him as he plucked a rose from a brier and laid it, with a kiss to its petals, under the headstone. And after that, when he spoke of old days, she seemed to answer with a more responsive kindness. They went into the church together, and he read once more the texts on the walls, which had been painted there in accordance with the great Queen's own instructions, and on samples of which he had so often, as a child, put his own infantine

interpretation. There was the 'Man doth not live by bread alone,' which on Sundays had always served him for a sort of jubilant sanction of the chopping dinner to follow, and presented the Deity as a jolly hospitable host, scorning half-measures; there was the 'Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards,' which had brought an unfailing picture of the village blacksmith, whose wife was a notorious scold; there was the 'Wizards that peep and that mutter,' a cryptic and suspicious contribution—displayed near the pulpit, too—which had afforded him many delicious thrills. He fell into a smiling reverie, recalling them all and their associations, and only roused from it with a sigh to hear the girl beside him speaking :—

'Mother never forgot you, Master Middleton. You were in her mind to the last.'

He looked wistfully in her face; then took her hand and led her from the building. At the door he stopped, to point mutely to yet another scroll upon the wall :—

'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.'

'You will let me, Alse?' he entreated outside. 'I have the right and the means to, notwithstanding all these years of separation.'

She understood him at once; but she shook her head, with a bright smile :—

'It is not so bad as that. We have enough, and to be independent and happy on. When the time comes, my brothers will care for me.'

He felt he could not urge her further without discredit to himself and insult to that brave young spirit. If, in her eyes, he had forfeited his right to, in her eyes

persistence would but blacken his case; and that he would not risk. He went back with her to the house, where, like a proper little hostess, she insisted upon serving him and Clerivault with a stirrup-cup of sweet metheglin to warm them for their homeward journey. He kissed his hand to her on starting. 'Goodbye, dear Alse!' he said. But she only dropped him a staid little courtesy in response, with a 'Fare thee well, Master Middleton.'

He was very silent as he rode back; might have felt even a deeper preoccupation could he have guessed how those same sweet eyes would go following his receding figure in imagination, on and on into the night, until they parted with it in the land of dreams, where hopeless Fancy yields itself to Oblivion.

'A winsome little lady, Sir,' said Clerivault, breaking into his abstraction, with an odd side-glance. 'A man might do worse than wive with such.'

'Worse!' He turned on his comrade, with a sudden violence: 'I tell you no gentleman of honour and renown but might count it his rich fortune to possess her—a gentleman—the best—nor such an one as, lapped in self-sufficiency, forgets past benefits—old claims and affections—a toad of ingratitude——'

He broke off with a choke, and spurring his horse in a quick fury, sprang on ahead. The other thought it wise to trail behind and let the subject be.

On the day following this visit Brion went to say good-bye to his friend, the Captain of the Queen's Guard. Raleigh came out to see him at the postern-gate which lay near his quarters. He was splendidly equipped, being just about to attend the Queen's Majesty on some ceremonial visit, and his manner

in consequence was a little abstracted and hurried, though smilingly genial.

'Well,' said he, 'I should be the last to traverse that decision, who lured thee hither with a bait so false. Acquit me of that. I am not of those who would rather lose a friend than a jest. May the next enterprise I draw thee on to be more fortunate. You'll remember your pledge to that?'

'The expedition? Did I pledge myself?'

'Or I thee, *for* thyself. It shall take shape in no long time. 'Tis such as thou I'll need, dear lad. And the patriot—above all the immense patriot.'

Brion laughed, and they parted. That same afternoon he and Clerivault started on their long journey homeward.

CHAPTER XXIV

COMMITTED

THE three or four years immediately succeeding that of Brion's first visit to London were ominous years for England—a fact which she did not fail to appreciate.

> 'There was a listening fear in her regard,
> As if calamity had but begun;
> As if the vanward clouds of evil days
> Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear
> Was with its stored thunder labouring up.'

The Irish rebellion—that vanward cloud of Philip's brewing, first step towards the conquest of our little hated Island and the extirpation of the Reformed religion—had been thrown back and defeated, but only to swell the enormous reserves of fanaticism which still accumulated behind, waiting to burst in the last devastating tempest of the *Armada*. And in the meantime the preparations, material and moral, went on. The dour King's emissaries were busy while his ships were building; his secret agents were everywhere, spying, reporting, seeking to corrupt. But, as in more recent days—one people's psychology being incomprehensible by another, and the disadvantage always lying to the race too dense in its blundering vanity to grasp that simple proposition—many of the conclusions drawn from evidence collected by these informers proved false, and, through being thought

true, helped to demoralize the very cause they were designed to advance. Such, for instance, was the belief, common in Spain, that the English Catholic nobility was, as a body, disaffected towards the usurping 'bastard' calling herself its Queen, and was to be depended on, in the event of an invasion, to join the enemy. It was a belief having a curious parallel with one cherished, though in a different direction, in our own time, and owed itself to exactly the same inability on the part of an arrogant and humourless people, thinking itself the salt of the earth, to understand that national pride, when tested, is found a stronger thing than dogma, and will combine to resist the imposition on it of any other people's ideas, whether religious or political. A few traitor exceptions there were, no doubt—men who still nursed the hope of deposing Elizabeth, establishing Scotch Mary on the throne, and restoring the true faith; but these were never more than enough to ruffle the surface of the steadfast deeps of popular opinion, and to keep pretty active and alert the general resolve to fall on and stamp out such symptoms wherever they were detected. Here and there, by misfortune, a patch of the disease did escape discovery, and, a little spreading through its immunity, came to imposthumate in an abortive rising like the Babington conspiracy—another little 'psychologic' mistake of Philip's, since its only effects were to shock some waverers into loyalty, and to hasten on the execution of the unhappy lady upon whom he had founded his hopes. But, with these indifferent qualifications, England remained England still, sound to the national core, and one in its determination to resist dictation by any power, temporal or spiritual.

Still, quite characteristically, the agents were not forborne, but in proportion as the preparations advanced, became more daring and insistent—but not more trustworthy in their reports. Allen, a polemical Jesuit of Rheims, and the founder of the English College at Douay, was responsible for the despatch to his native land of a number of proselytising scouts, secret emissaries deputed to test popular feeling, and sow wherever they could the seeds of disaffection. They did little, however, but inflame the national obduracy; for by this time the country was determinedly Protestant, and the knowledge of these *agents provocateurs* let loose in its midst only agitated and angered it. Now and again one, being caught, would pay the penalty of his temerity to the severe enactments passed against his kind; now and again one would fall a victim to popular fury. But still they came, and still misread and misreported—but not always, as the sequel will show, in the pure interests of their mission. There was one, at least, who, whatever his original motive, converted the opportunity given him to some profitable dealing on his own account. But knavish methods will ever attract knavish instruments, and undercut, in all the history of trading, cut undercut.

In 1584, a Jesuit, having in his possession a plan for the invasion of England and the destruction of its Queen, was captured at sea. The news roused public indignation to boiling pitch, and led indirectly to an association being formed, with Leicester at its head, to punish with death any attempt upon the royal life, and to exclude from the throne all who should authorize such an attempt, or design in any way to profit by it —another big nail driven into poor Mary's coffin.

Brion heard of this league, and was vaguely troubled —not because of its object, but because of the temper it revealed and fomented, and to which, in some possible local ebullition of itself, he dreaded his Uncle might come to fall a victim. He knew that the neighbourhood had long looked darkly askance upon the ex-judge as a backslider and idolater, who practised, in secret, rites which might bring him to the stake if avowed. He knew—but he knew also what rumour did not; that it was a ruined and dethroned intellect which had reverted to its ancient creed, not from re-established conviction, but from simple loss of memory. To senility early impressions are the most remembered things; and for Quentin Bagott—though senile only in the sense of one beggared by his habits of life's best maturity —the years of his conversion were become a vague shadow, full of strange terrors and menacing shapes. His conspiring was a myth; he had no power of will or mind left in him to plot a sparrow's downfall. Any sympathy he might appear to show with designs subversive to the State was the mere chuckling echo of long-forgotten moods, when his own dark destiny had wrought in him the passions of a rebel. Yet all this, though true enough, had no appeal in it for brute instincts, if once let loose in the name of superstition; nor would the fact of the utter seclusion in which the suspect buried himself, and with himself all indications of his real thoughts and habits, save him from a predetermined fate. Religion has hung more men on circumstantial evidence than all the lay tribunals in the world.

However, this was in very truth a meeting of trouble half way, since no sign whatever of threatened

disturbance had arisen so far to justify in Brion any particular apprehension. Moreover, there was the extenuating fact to consider that he himself was locally popular enough, and that he and the household of the Grange, its master excepted, were regular in their orthodox observances. So he put the thought from him as a mere bugbear of his fancy, and trusted to his own unexceptionable attitude for public absolution.

His life during these, for him, uneventful years, had recorded little of interest but the growth of will and tissue, the intelligent, and often excited, watching of affairs, and the ever increasing desire to take some part in the great happenings which were stirring men's imaginations the world over. As to those, he was at the last solemnly bound and pledged to an enterprise of which he only awaited with impatience the fruition to put his dreams into action. In the meantime he observed with envious admiration how England, for all her distractions, domestic and political, did not stand still, in scared irresolution, before the storms which menaced her, but continued her practices of daring and adventure over all the troubled waters of the globe, even, after her way, snatching immense booty from the very preparations being organised for her destruction. The names of Fox, Cabot, Gilbert, Drake, Frobisher, and other stalwart rovers of the main, rang in his, as in everybody's ears, and fired him with an enthusiasm to be up and doing, in his own little sphere, what they had so magnificently ensampled in their greater. And he was sworn, as has been said, to his part, if only the plans which were to give him scope for action would come to a head; which at length, towards the close of 1584, they did.

Brion was then in London, with Clerivault, for the second time since that visit first recorded. He was staying, as Raleigh's guest, at Durham House in the Strand—a former 'Inn' of the Bishops of Durham, presented by the young Edward VI to his sweet 'sister Temperance,' and afterwards by her to her much favoured courtier. It was an austere but imposing building on the riverside, involving such expenditure in its maintenance that, to enable its owner to live there in a state befitting its character, his accommodating sovereign had conferred upon him a patent to license the vending of wines throughout the kingdom—a sinecure so rich in emoluments as to make him, with his other properties, a wealthy man; though it may be said for him that he spent his fortune magnificently, and often much of it in the public interest. Yet still dissatisfied, it seemed, with these tokens of her royal regard, her Majesty continued to heap benefits on that lucky recipient, confirming his election as Knight of the Shire of Devon, and further, about this time or a little later, appointing him Seneschal of the Duchies of Cornwall and Exeter, and Lord Warden of the Stannaries in Devon and Cornwall, besides bestowing upon him some twelve thousand acres of forfeited land in Cork and Waterford, with other signal marks of her attachment. So that, it would seem, the 'pack of small accomplishments' had been exploited to rare effect, with the result that its owner had become one of the most envied and courted men in the Kingdom.

Sir Walter's good fortune, however, had not turned his head, nor in the least diverted him from the main cherished ambition of his life, which was to wrest the empire of the New World from the Spaniard, and lay

it, with all its potentialities for colonisation, at his brave England's feet. During the year before he had partly financed the unfortunate expedition in which Sir Humphrey Gilbert perished; during this he had associated himself with an enterprise for the discovery of the North-West passage. In the meantime, having obtained from the Queen a patent of liberty to discover and seize, if might be, 'any remote heathen and barbarous lands not actually possessed by any Christian Prince, nor inhabited by Christian people,' with licence to inhabit and fortify the same, and leave to carry with him 'such of our subjects' as, in short, cared to go, he set to preparing joyfully for the venture so long projected, and at last come within the sphere of practical policy. He first, however, despatched a provisional expedition of two vessels, fitted at his own expense, which going and returning in safety, and reporting favourably upon the country and their reception therein, the main business was forthwith put definitely in hand, and arrangements made for a fleet of seven sail to start from Plymouth in the following April. And it was to this expedition that Brion had positively committed himself, and to discuss which he had accepted his friend's invitation to a meeting in London.

He was sorry to discover at the outset that Raleigh himself—being too greatly engaged over matters of divers import, and perhaps fearing that his enemies might take advantage of his absence to bring about his overthrow—was not to accompany his own enterprise; and still more so to learn that the command thereof was to be entrusted to Sir Richard Grenville, about whom he retained no very cordial memories, and who, indeed, as he had heard, possessed the reputa-

tion for being a rough and violent leader, much feared and hated by his own men. However, he had given his undertaking, from which, as a gentleman, he could not recede; and so he must make the best of it, and that was all the matter. And, indeed, when he came, as he did, to renew at Durham House the acquaintance of the obstreperous Sheriff, he found himself in some measure called on to revise his estimate of him, so inexplicably, if gruffly, genial did he find the great man to be with him—an attitude for which he could find no explanation but in Raleigh's friendship, though in truth it was a testimony to the way in which, on that first occasion, he had prepossessed the surly visitor in his favour.

Some others destined to the expedition he also met on this occasion, of whom one or two were captains and skilful mariners selected for the sub-commands, a few assistants for counsel and direction in the voyage, and others mere gentlemen adventurers like himself, whose acquaintance thus happily begun he was as happily to renew in after days. And with that the matter ended for him for the time being, and he returned into the country.

He went, glowing with anticipation, and concerned only for the months which still lay between him and action: he went, with some valedictory words of Raleigh's still sounding inspiringly in his brain:—

'Press on! Would I could follow thee—I, a poor impositioned schoolboy left at his task while all his shouting playmates go bounding for the fields. To voyage—there's a magic in the word: to quit inglorious bondage, custom's dull round, and be a man and free; to wake from mean small cares to visions of

great seas, and waves that lift us, as nurses lift their charges, to spy over the tossing heads some wondrous sight; to greet upon our faces sweetest-laden winds, breathing like amorous sighs from lands that court their own rifling; to see strange monsters, big as ships, rolling in their feather-beds of foam. O, could I go, and share with thee the peril and the joy, and the joy in peril—two wandering champions of our dear lady-land! But, since I cannot, press on, press on, and if over the sheer cliff of the world, the stars they hang beyond, bright shrouds to climb to topmast heaven withal. That's the way of Death, the happy way. Why do we for ever paint him as a grim old man, that follows on our heels waiting his chance to strike? He pursues us not, but bides to be discovered, a laughing child hiding behind a bush. He is not age, but youth, eternal youth; a beauteous boy, who smiles to close our eyes on years and sorrow; who comes with oblivion in his hand, bidding us drink and forget; who is the only friend that never fails us. Press on—take thy life in thy hand like a tempered sword, and so thou use it knightly in good cause, be careless whether it hold or break, thou hast made the most of it in honour. This world! is it so worth thy soul's attachment?—a world where the great is ever at the mercy of the little, the high the low; where nobility eternally wastes itself, striving to kill the beast in man that cannot die; where beauty is but painfully achieved one day to be despoiled the next—a grievous world, a world so bad 'tis odds but any change from it must mean for better. Yet as thou strivest in it so shall be thy qualification for another. There's its purpose. In truth it is but the jellied spawn of lovelier spheres,

the egg on the leaf, a transient bubble blown in thick starlight, and jewelled with a thousand seeds of worlds to be. Make light of it, then, press on in steadfast probity, and leave to Heaven thine accompt.'

CHAPTER XXV

THE FUGITIVE

It was March, 1585, and but a few weeks remained to Brion before starting on the great adventure. All his and Clerivault's preparations were made, and they only awaited the signal to join the fleet at Plymouth, and launch upon whatever destiny the unknown might have in store for them. Some anxiety may have been his: misgivings, none. He was now twenty-six—the age of fully matured strength and reason and the fearless confidence that goes with both—and ripe manhood in him peremptorily demanded its employment and enlargement in scenes of vigorous action. His sole concern lay in thus temporarily abandoning his Uncle to the possible perils of an agitated time; but, as to that, having confessed his fears to Raleigh, he had found some reassurance in his friend's promise to have a watch kept on the district, and any sinister symptoms appearing therein at once reported to him, when they should be drastically dealt with. That undertaking, and the confidence he felt in the stalwart fidelity of the household remaining, had to be his sufficient guarantees in the question of the untoward coming to threaten.

He would have liked, from that one point of view, to leave Clerivault behind; only his pledge was given. Moreover, to insist, would have wounded that excellent's feelings beyond cure. Clerivault, while still retaining

his grateful attachment to, and sorrowful belief in, his old master, had yet come to regard as the crowning expression of his allegiance his devotion to the younger trust committed to him. He was dedicated body and soul to the service of the nephew, and to be separated from him, or considered inessential to his welfare in any way, would have killed his very heart. Wherefore the outrage was not even to be considered; and Nol porter must take his place in personally attending on the recluse—a task for which at least that great creature's physical strength fitted him, inasmuch as his Honour, the wreck of a great man himself, was often in need, owing to his enfeebled capacities and shattered constitution, of the support and assistance which only strong arms could afford him.

As to Quentin Bagott himself, he was little more than a cypher in the business, wanting his nephew to go, and not wanting him; now dwelling on the eternal loneliness to which he was condemned, now implying a sort of furtive glee in the prospect of that loneliness being intensified. He did not know his own mind—as, indeed, how should he, that feeble remnant of the force that once had been, and, such as it had become, devoted to fears and superstitions? No one looking upon him in these days but must have felt the tragedy of that ruined intellect. It mourned from the brilliant eyes, set in the wasted and degraded features, about which the black hair that hung in neglected strands was still without a touch of gray in it; it drooped in the apathetic shoulders, yielded at last, and unresisting, to the burden of fatality; it spoke in the blurred, disjointed voice, which was like that of a sleeper only half awakened. Now and again, in instants of rare

provocation, a ray of the old brilliancy would flash out; but for the most part the man's faculties were hopelessly obscured, and he would sit for long hours together in a blank preoccupation, staring, as it might be, into a baffling fog, where moving shadows that never materialized shrunk, and expanded, and intensified, and again faded into nebulous blots.

If during these years, so inoperative, and so barren in their prospect, a thought which seemed to tremble near the verge of treason to himself had come now and again into Brion's mind, who can wonder at it. It was a thought of a little house in far-away Clapham, and of a figure going always cheerfully and capably about its business there. He had seen Alse once again during his second visit to London, and had pleasantly renewed in her an impression as of something very wholesome and fragrant, like a garden herb, and as such associating itself with perfumed thoughts in homely ways. To uproot so sweet a plant from under that old church wall, and transport it to these unproductive solitudes—what a difference it might make, to him, to all, to the whole atmosphere of the place! It was at least a pleasant fancy to indulge; and could even be supported by some arguments—a little specious. The girl would, he believed, be glad to come. Was he justified, in that case, in sacrificing her happiness to a vain ideal? Again, had he the moral right to waste himself on a profitless abstraction? Every mortal man held his affections in trust for some mortal woman, so that to maintain oneself celibate for a dream's sake was to rob not one but two natures of their just fulfilment. Supposing he were to decide to be done, for once and for all, with that old dead illusion, and to

accept the living gift the gods had offered him? Let him, for amusement's sake, just consider that possibility. Clerivault, he knew very well, would, for one, be delighted. But then Clerivault knew nothing of the other——

The other—O, the other! Only to think of her was to banish every lesser thought. Was this the value of his deathless fidelity? His, yes; but what of hers? Ah, time enough to turn away from that dear illusion when its falseness should be a proven thing!

He had reached, maybe, that period in his reflections when Raleigh's summons to London came; and at once everything else, comfortable visions, specious arguments, soft and amorous fancies, were swept aside and forgotten in the excitement of the approaching adventure. His soul was too greatly occupied to be patient any longer of such minor distractions.

Nor was it different when he returned. He lived for the coming voyage, and was bent only on one purpose —to make, by constant vigorous exercise, the interval between now and then appear as short as possible.

One afternoon, in late February of the New Year, he had gone out riding on the moors, rather to work off an excess of animal spirits than for any attraction the day offered, for it was bleak and cold, with a shrill wind blowing in from the sea. He was alone, and had ridden eastward to within sight of Highweek church, standing up solitary and austere from the folds of the shivering hills, when, turning into a narrow gulch between two rocky slopes, he saw a pedestrian coming towards him from the direction of Newton Bushel and the head of the Teign estuary. The figure, the moment it sighted him, stopped, and made a hurried

movement as if to turn and retreat, but, thinking better of it, or recognising the hopelessness of the attempt, continued its advance, and slowly approached the spot where he had reined in, waiting the explanation of so suspicious an action. As the stranger drew near, walking, it seemed, with considerable difficulty, Brion had leisure to study his aspect, and to wonder over certain details of it. He appeared a man of about forty, of mean stature, but blunt and strong, and he was dressed like a simple citizen in a suit of plain black, with no more decoration about it than was exhibited in a pair of epauletted shoulders. His close-cropt scalp was hatless, and underneath appeared a serious, beardless face, possessed of a very prim, dry, dogmatic expression, and, in odd contrast, curious hot brown eyes, the pupils of which were not black but tawny, and ringed at their circumferences with a brighter russet. But all this no more than indicated itself, as it were, through a veil of disorder, for his features were grim white and drawn with suffering, his clothes streaked and soiled, and his whole appearance suggestive of some recent conflict in which he had been violently worsted. Having made up his mind, he came limping resolutely on, and never hesitated until he reached the horseman, to whom, without an instant's pause, he made his desperate appeal:—

'I am being hunted for my life, Sir: I have done no wrong: for God's sake, if you are a Christian man, help me to escape.'

A moment Brion sat looking at him: it was not in his heart to deny a fellow-creature in such straits, and appearing so spent and broken. He was not of those, moreover, who in an emergency argue before they act.

With a curt word he slipped his left foot out of the stirrup, and bent over. 'Mount behind,' said he, and as the fugitive struggled exhaustedly to heave himself to the horse's crupper, fetched a strong hand under his armpit and helped him into place. 'Now,' said he, 'hold on to my belt,' and with a tap of his heel to his good steed's belly, they were off.

'Whither?' he said over his shoulder, presently slowing down; and the breathless voice answered in his ear: 'Whithersoever, so it lead to where they cannot find me.'

'You wish to hide?'

'O! indeed I do.'

'Listen to me,' said Brion: 'I can hide you, an you will, where none will dream to look. But it is a drear uncanny place, and without comfort to one in your condition.'

'Will it not serve a broken man to die in? I ask but rest and peace.'

'Well, hold on again. I will take you there.'

'"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was." I can say no more now, Sir, than God bless you. You shall hear all presently.'

They sped on again, without another word between them. If Brion had a suspicion, he kept it to himself. His present fierce joy lay in circumventing brutality. Moreover he foresaw a certain distraction here to help him through the weary time of waiting. He went a wild roundabout way in order to avoid the chance of casual meetings, the bitter weather aiding him, and struck the ilex copse without having encountered a soul. Driving between the trees, he dismounted, first bidding the other hold firm by the saddle, while he

tethered his horse to a branch, and afterwards helped him to the ground.

'Now,' said he, 'if they, whoever they be, are after you, despatch must be the word.'

The man stood very weak. Brion put an arm about him—observing as he did so that his clothes were stiff and sodden, as if with half-dried sea-water—and supported him through the wood. In all these years, since that day of poignant memory, he had never once retraversed this road to the old well-house. But Sentiment must yield to Urgency. The natural bridge still spanned the moat, and they crossed it together—painfully and with difficulty on the stranger's part; but, with his escort's strong help, the journey was made at last, and the well-house reached. Once within, Brion lost no time, but, by aid of what daylight entered, found his way to the familiar contrivance, and laid bare the subterranean opening. Descending, then, he helped the other down after him, and, reaching the little stone-lined chamber, laid his own riding-cloak on the ground and the wounded man on it.

'Now,' said he: 'so far's so well. But I must e'en shut you away and leave you thus till I have withdrawn that evidence of my steed in the copse. Which having done, I will return with due caution, and bring you what comforts I can compass on the instant. Will that serve you?'

The strange eyes looked up at him in the wan twilight. They were full of weary pain; but, even tempering it, a ghost of fathomless curiosity.

'I thank you from my heart,' said their owner. 'Will you first, in one word, tell me where I am?'

'You are in the old well-house of the Moated Grange,

a manor belonging to my uncle, Master Quentin Bagott. The secret of this chamber is known only to me, who discovered it by chance. You are as safe here as in a fortress—or safer, since ignorance and superstition hold it more inviolate than would locks and bolts.'

And with that he went, unconscious of the emotion his words had awakened in the stranger's breast. He recrossed the moat, regained and remounted his horse, and going round to the main entrance, rode into the courtyard with as matter-of-fact an air as if nothing untoward lay upon his mind.

Now his next business was to forage without attracting undue observation. But, as to that, having a general way with him the least tolerant of any inquisitiveness as to the motives of his actions, he might appropriate whatever he pleased, and for whatever mysterious purpose, without fear of exciting comment, other than such as might privately turn upon another of the young master's inscrutable fancies. So, going very coolly about it, he provided himself with bread and meat, a flagon of good Malmsey, a packet of tapers with materials for making a fire, a heavy horse-cloth from the stable, and, from an outhouse, with a spare brazier stuffed with lumps of charcoal: armed with all of which commodities, he made his way into the garden, leaving behind him an impression that he was bent on one of those solitary gipsy picnics to which on fine evenings he had more than once been drawn.

It was nearing dusk as Brion, loaded as he was, disappeared among the ilexes.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN INCUBUS

'THOU hast bound up my wounds, and set me on thine own beast, and brought me to an inn,' said the stranger. 'Blessed be thy living witness to Christ's parable.'

He had the inscrutable eyes of a hare. Say what he might, there was always something at odds between them and the picked precision of his speech. He sat propped against a pillow formed of Brion's cloak; the great horse-cloth was wrapped about his naked limbs; his clothes were spread to dry near the glowing brazier; he had eaten little of the food and drunk feverishly of the wine, and his tongue was loosened.

Brion nodded. 'Let us have done with compliments. Am I to know your name and business?'

'I am a simple trader, an Englishman, by name John Melton.'

'Well, we will return to that. And now, Master Melton, an it please you, what brought a simple trader to such plight?'

'Sir, I owe you the plain story; and here it is. In the darkness before dawn this morning a hoy, standing off from the coast, was driven ashore at Teignmouth by the fury of the wind and waves. Something, I know not what, aroused in the rough folk who helped to beach her a belief that there were Catholic emissaries from Picardy on board, and in a moment the devil was ablaze in them. For some most unjustifiable reason

their suspicions fell on me, of whom their fanatic hatred would have made an instant victim, casting me into a fire of driftwood they prepared to build upon the shore, had I not through God's grace and the darkness succeeded in escaping from their cruel hands. Battered and wounded, I fled at random, their shouts and imprecations following me as I ran. By dawn I had gained the heights, whence, hiding and observing, I could see the chase, now gathered in volume, still furious on my tracks. Had they once scattered, I had been lost, but they kept together, while I scurried on before, taking advantage of every scrap of cover. Still they pressed on, like hounds intent and inexorable, and to me, hurt and exhausted as I was, there could have come but one end, had I not, through merciful Providence, chanced, when near my last gasp, on a charitable stranger. That is all my tale.'

Brion, regarding the speaker enigmatically, did not respond for a moment.

'So,' said he at last, 'you came in the boat?'

'That is perfectly true.'

'And from Picardy—where there are Jesuits?'

'And traders.'

'True; and pardoners among them, mayhap—vendors of spurious relics to the credulous, pigs' bones for saints,' a feather of the cock that crew St Peter into shame, and of other things no less false and profitable—Papal indulgences, to wit, for any that would be traitors to their country.'

'It is not true.'

'Why, I know you for a Papist, else would you ne'er have spoke of "Catholic" emissaries.'

'I deny it not. Denounce me for it, an you will.

Wounded and in your power, I shall not abjure my faith.'

'Your necessity, as you should know, is your surest appeal to mine.'

'Yet you can show so little Christian tolerance as to assume, without proof, a certain vileness in me, and for no reason but just that I am a Catholic. Tell me this, Sir: is Papistry, as you call it, countenanced in your England?'

'With reason, no.'

'We'll spare the reason. It is not countenanced, at least. Then, for the convinced English Catholic there is no alternative to apostacy but—Picardy, shall we say?'

'God forbid I should quarrel with any man for his religion. Only for yours, Picardy is a wholesomer climate than Devon.'

'My hurts cry Amen to that.'

'Why not have remained there, then?'

'Is it so unusual for an exile to yearn towards the land of his birth—especially an he envisage a prospect to combine some business with pleasure there? But I see you do not believe me. Well, Sir, bruised and battered though I be, I would sooner be put to lie out in the fields than accept a bounty offered on such terms. Or would you be the treacherous husbandman of the fable, with whom the poor driven fox took shelter, and keep me here, to point out to the hunt my hiding-place? It may ride up anon. Be sure those bloody miscreants will rouse the neighbourhood, and there will be search for me. Well, I am sick and friendless and at your mercy.'

He had spoken from the first in a voice weak and

languid, though always oddly preserving its dry particularity, and now sank back as if exhausted, closing his eyes. But still Brion regarded him unmoved, it seemed, by either his explanations or his taunts. Something, he felt, rang false—he could not say what, but it certainly was not the man's physical hurts, which were very definite and serious. There was reality enough in them to outweigh for the moment any thought of moral deception. One in particular on the side, the result of a terrible blow from a metal bar or stone, bore a sinister look. No rib, so far as he could ascertain, was fractured, but he feared some bad internal injury. He had done, and he did hereafter, all that he could to alleviate the suffering caused by this injury, using what soft compresses and tender balsams he could filch from Mother Harlock's preserves; but still the pain did not seem to mend, and its persistence troubled him. Supposing the man were to die on his hands, to what unresolvable difficulties would he not have committed himself? However, the thing was done, and might God help him in having acted humanely on impulse instead of discreetly on reflection.

'I pass by your bitter words,' he said, standing over the prone figure, 'which some might think had savoured of ingratitude, but which I take for an ill man's ravings. Be assured, I shall not betray you. What is to the point is how not to make myself suspect. It can be done, and safely, but only at the expense of my company. You must do without my visiting you, save at daily intervals. I will bring you all you need from time to time, food, and more comforts, and so will continue till you are in a condition to be released and sped upon your way. By that time, let us hope,

the hue and cry will have died down and yourself be forgotten. That dark dawn can have little familiarised your persecutors with your features. For the brazier, I will bring to-morrow the wherewithal to screen it; yet methinks, once warmed, you'll need but little artificial heat in this subterranean chamber. It were wise to kindle no taper but on urgent need. For the rest, you are buried here as inviolate as in a tomb. No one of the household nor the near neighbourhood would so much as come near the place: it hath an evil reputation with the foolish. But that need not concern you. Are you willing that I leave you now?'

The eyes were opened and staring at him again—strange blots in the dying glow; the lips whispered, it seemed, some inarticulate thanksgiving. Brion, with a curt 'good-night,' turned and mounted the steps. In the chamber above, having closed and spun the wheel, he paused a moment to see if any tell-tale gleam issued from the edges of the orifice; but detecting no least hint of such, he went, satisfied, into the night.

Henceforth he kept to his word, visiting the fugitive once at least a day, bringing him good sustenance and more comfortable stuff for his bedding, and staying to converse awhile as he bandaged the inflamed and aching flesh. Sometimes he would go by the garden and sometimes by the wood: the little sport of secrecy and evasion tickled him for a while; it was like a game, and he was still boy enough to enjoy a game. Yet now and again it *would* occur to him that a game indefinitely prolonged might lose its point, and expose, through constant use, its own machinery; and so far no period to the one he was playing seemed suggested. An uncomfortable feeling dawned and developed in him that

he had burdened himself, and at a crucial time, with an undetachable incubus. As the days went on, in proportion as the invalid's main injury seemed to heal superficially, the inner hurt appeared to intensify. The fact threatened to confirm his first most grave suspicions; but it did not help to solve his difficulties. He began to foresee the ultimate necessity of taking somebody into his confidence. What if matters should go from bad to worse? He was doing his best for the man; but his best was after all only the best of ignorance. Good intentions might very well make bad nurses, unless reinforced by knowledge. Instead of curing he might be actually helping to kill.

The patient, in fact, in defiance of all the young man's ministrations, continued to look ghastly; he seemed to speak with difficulty; he complained of eternal pain and unrest. And no wonder, buried, so injured, in that dank and gloomy crypt. One welcome change there was: soft and open Spring weather had followed on that day of cold and storm, mitigating the frigid atmosphere of the stone chamber. Going down the garden on the morning after the encounter, Brion felt his every pore expanding with delight. Balm was in the air; an incense rose from the earth; the winter aconites had blinked the frost from their golden eyes, and, with their ruffs starched and smart, were smiling in holiday rows under the wall. Even a surviving snowdrop or two—those sweet little acolytes of Candlemas, as Clerivault called them—opened their hearts to the sun, and betrayed to it the tender green thoughts they were used to guard so shyly.

Brion, descending to the patient, found him, a little to his surprise, shifted from the position in which he

had left him the night before to one in an angle of the wall where the brazier had been formerly set. They had exchanged places, in fact. Remarking on the transposition, he was informed by the other, in that weak, precisely-measured voice of his, that, growing chill in the small hours, he had bethought himself to take advantage of the warmth reflected to the stones by the then extinguished charcoal, and had so made shift to effect the change, which he had with difficulty accomplished, lying with his body against the hot wall. That, as a stratagem, was resourceful enough: the perplexing thing to Brion was how one in so feeble a state could have put it into practice. Yet, again, that state seemed indisputable. One had only to look at the man to know he could not be malingering.

They talked a little together, desultorily. The stranger was curious about the superstition which kept his hiding-place inviolate; and Brion, seeing no reason for concealment, told him all about the legend of the departed buccaneer, and the fate of the unfortunate young relative who had got to know more about his affairs than was good for his health or hers. The eyes always seemed to listen to him more than the ears: they blinked no facts, and confessed no emotions —none in the least over their owner's contiguity to the place of that dark reputed tragedy. He was evidently 'insusceptible,' in the superstitious sense.

'And was, Sir,' he said, 'this business of the wheel some of that Fulke's contriving?'

'No,' said Brion. 'I understand it was here long before his time.'

'It is a clever contrivance, whoever designed it.

I have seen some in my day, and none, I think, so well thought out. *Prudens simplicitas.*'

. . . . . .

Day succeeded day, and week week, and still the patient showed no signs of mending, but sat propped against the wall, with that eternal aspect of weakness and suffering which had never changed since Brion first brought him into the pit. The young fellow was at his wits' end to know what to do. Time was flying, and at any moment he might receive his summons from Plymouth. At length he made up his mind, and laid bare the whole truth to Clerivault—enormously, as may be supposed, to that paragon's astonishment.

'I believe,' said Brion, 'the poor wretch is dying: and I cannot leave him to die there. What am I to do?'

'A secret chamber—in the old well-house!' gasped Clerivault; 'and to discover it—God's 'slid! thou must have dared alone the haunted terrors of that place!'

'Yes, yes,' said Brion impatiently—'and a fig for such bugbears. But that is not the point. He must be brought out—brought here—put to bed—old Harlock must see him—God o' mercy! I shall go demented!'

He started striding forth and back, his fingers wound desperately in his hair. Clerivault quieted him down :—

'Ah, peace, my sweetheart! We will arrange it.'

'But you do not know—my fears, my suspicions, my distractions. I will not, for all the world, that mine Uncle and he be brought together—nor so much as learn, each one, that the other is in the house.'

'No need to, if he is dying.'

'He may not die, if at all, until after we are gone.'

'H'mph!'

It was a problem, in truth, of which, on profound consideration, there appeared only one solution. Nol and Phineas and William and Mrs Harlock must be taken into one confidence on the subject, and form a conspiracy to keep the fact of the stranger's presence in the house a secret equally from their lord and from the whole world. If the man survived, he was to be packed quietly away on his recovery; if he died, then the authorities must be informed, the plain explanation being that the body was that of a poor stranger whom the young master had found injured by the way, and had of his pity brought home to tend. Nobody knew who he was or whence come, so nobody could say.

So Clerivault took it upon himself to inform and instruct the household, and so it was settled. As to any risk of search at this date, it was considered negligible. If the neighbourhood *had* been aroused, it had shown no disposition to suspect the Grange of harbouring the fugitive. Some vague rumours of the Teignmouth affair had come Clerivault's way, but it did not appear from them how far the pursuit had been pressed, or whether, even, it had been of that determined character which perhaps the fears of the victim had magnified. In all probability the whole affair was by now completely forgotten.

Brion, to be sure, had no liking for the arrangement; but he was in a desperate quandary, and, short of an inhumanity impossible to him, could see no other way out of it. And then the summons to the voyage came; and that clinched the matter.

On the evening of the day when he received it, he

went to visit his patient, and to impress upon him the necessity for his instant removal to the house. Somewhat to his astonishment and displeasure, he encountered an opposition where he had the least expected one.

'You would rather remain where you are, Master Melton?' said he, haughtily surprised. 'Then give me leave to tell you that you will remain to perish, since, I being gone, none other could be found to approach within a score yards of this thicket under which you lie buried.'

'Sir, my beneficent saviour,' answered the other, with a low-voiced, measured humility: 'may it never be yours to suffer the hounding of malignant foes, or, having escaped, broken and demoralised, from their violence, be urged to tempt the Providence which has found you a secure retreat by leaving it untimely for another.'

'Untimely!' cried Brion with impatience. 'I tell you, man, I quit here to-morrow: I shall be absent for many months. What would you do?'

'With utmost deference, Sir, would it not be possible for you, ere you go, to convey hither to me a moderate store of food and drink, and, having so satisfied your hospitable conscience, dismiss from your mind all question of further responsibility regarding my welfare? Then, if at last forced by my condition to reveal myself, I could make shift to emerge from this confinement, if only to beg of your people a corner in which to die?'

The young man stood fairly astounded before this cool proposition.

'*No*, Master Melton,' said he, with emphasis: 'it would not be possible. If the worst were to come upon you—you force me to speak plain—you would be in

no state to make the effort you imply: in which case —but I leave to your imagination the pleasant sequel. Come, prepare yourself to shift. You shall be conveyed to a comfortable bed, and your hurts tended by one of a better skill and knowledge than ever I could pretend to. The household is pledged to secrecy: in the matter of risk, I believe on my soul there is no shadow of any —you are long forgotten by the very men who chased you. And the moment you are fit to travel you shall be free to go. Come.'

The fugitive uttered a little sigh.

'I yield all,' said he, 'to him to whom I owe all.'

He crawled painfully from under the cloth which covered him, and which he fumbled back into the wall-corner where he had lain; and, supported by Brion, laboriously climbed the steps into the chamber above.

'Are you not going to close the wheel?' said he, panting and pallid, as they paused a moment, after emerging from the aperture.

'Presently will serve,' answered Brion: 'when I have seen you into safety.'

'Now, Sir, now, let me entreat you! If any accident should happen—if it should be overlooked—a clue——'

'Peace, then!' exclaimed the young man; and he hurriedly and rather pettishly did as he was asked. Truly this most unconscionable invalid was a trial to one's patience.

Outside the ilex clump, Clerivault, white and grim, stood waiting in the thunderous dusk. He had volunteered to dare the terrors of the awful place; but Brion, seeing what the offer cost him, had laughingly declined his company, saying he could manage much better by himself. They took the stranger between them, and,

without more ado, carried rather than supported him to the house, and, smuggling him by a back way to the upper chamber, remotest from Quentin Bagott's quarters, which had been prepared for him, put him to bed, and left him in the hands of that old wintry bird of prey, Mother Harlock, who forthwith proceeded to examine his hurts with the dark relish peculiar to her kind. Coming to seek Brion presently, she gave him, in a muttered whisper, the result of her diagnosis :—

'The man's sore smitten.'

'Will he die?'

'A hath a dog's chance—given my vuln'ry water. 'Twere distilled from the plantain in the year of its becoming a bird.'

'Of what becoming a bird? The plantain? Does the plantain become a bird?'

'Every seventh year, and cries "cuckoo!" Did you not know it, child?'

'On my faith, no.'

'Ay. 'Tis the reason it lacks a nest of its own.'

'But——' he gave it up, bubbling with expressionless laughter. 'You had better go and get it,' said he.

He had hoped for something more informative. As it was, her verdict left him exactly where he had been. However, there was no help for it; the man was there, and there he must now remain, until Destiny decided one way or the other on the question of his disposal. In the meantime the faithful souls who were to represent his authority during his absence would see to it that his instructions were implicitly carried out.

He parted from his Uncle that evening, as he and Clerivault had to be on their way at an early hour the following morning. Going in to the recluse, with a

certain emotion at his heart, he found him characteristically occupied between a Vulgate and a great tankard of burnt sack plentifully laced with Nantes brandy. A thread of incense, rising from a tiny chafing dish on the table, seemed designed, like a pious kissing-comfit, to neutralise the pungent breath of that ungodly mixture; while the mentality which could appropriate such material to such a use appeared further illustrated in the faldstool, or prie-Dieu, set before a bureau on which stood a laughing head in bronze of a leaf-crowned Dionysus.

The ex-Judge looked up vacantly, as Brion entered, and motioned him mechanically to a seat.

'Not now,' said the young man. 'The time that remains to me here is short. I have come to ask your blessing on my venture, Uncle Quentin.'

Staring a moment, the other shook his head.

'What venture, nephew?'

'Have you forgotten? To the New World.'

He seemed to listen and weigh; and then a sudden light went up in his brain :—

'To the New World? My blessing? A devil's viaticum that! A curse from my lips might speed thee better.'

'Come, Uncle. You will not start me on such handicap, like the poor scratch in the game. I of all should know what your blessing is worth to one you love.'

Bagott passed his hand across his eyes.

'Do you say so, boy? Yet you will leave me.'

'Would you not have me go?'

'To the New World? Ay.' He seemed to muse, pondering some vision. 'For whither she hath gone should not her son follow?' He stared and stared before

him, till his eyes ran with weak tears. 'I loved your mother, Brion,' he sobbed: 'I loved your mother.'

It was useless to prolong the scene. The young man knelt, and took the shaking hands in his, and, kissing them, laid them on his own head. They slipped down to imprison his face, to draw it towards the dishonoured lips whose utterance had yet never meant to him aught but truth and love.

By six o'clock the next day he and Clerivault and Nol porter were on the Plymouth road, the latter riding with them to convey the baggage, and to bring back the horses. Their way took them by Holne Chase and the head of the Horse-shoe Glen. It was a fair April morning, blue and white and gold. The birds were singing as they never sang but about that lovely haunted spot. It seemed suddenly to Brion that the fetters of long years were broken, and that he was riding forth to challenge the vision not of what was to be, but of what had been and fled. Love was on the heights, and it was the morning of an older day.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE VOYAGE

'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the light-house top.'

A sky of liquid blue freighted with lazy argosies of clouds; the green lift of the Hoe under, like England on its feet to cry them God speed; drums and fiddles sounding on the quay; sunshine and merriment and colour in infinite variety coming up from the water and going down to it; beyond all, the ships themselves, resplendent painted craft, beflagged and picture-sailed, webbed with glistening shrouds, their fighting tops streaming blood-red pennons, like giant beacons alive with tongues of flame, their prows and side galleries minutely carved and frosted with gilding, coats of arms emblazoned on their poops, eyes of excitement appear ing even in their port-holes, where each gun seemed to have thrust up its own little window to peep forth and see what all the fun was about—so, to such views and accompaniments, was brazen Adventure launched in Brion's day, and so had been his. He had found it all very right and inspiring. He could have seen no reason in the world why serious business should go clothed in drab raiment, as if it feared the issue. Colour had its definite value in the scheme of things, and limbs were no less sturdy nor hearts strong because silk and

velvet covered them. There was tough oak under the gilding, as there was invincible valour under the bright feathers and doublets, the shining morions and breast-plates. Enterprise, it was felt, lost nothing in a brave send-off, nor would lose again, for all that the ships which now weighed so gallantly should come staggering back to their moorings, after long months of adventure, soiled, battered, befouled, stripped to the very bed-rock of their unconquerable stubbornness.

So—ships and music and cheering crowds and dancing water and blue sky and green hills—Brion had seen the picture, and gone down into it and become part of it, until the world was suddenly moving before his eyes, and he had discovered that it was not it that was leaving him but he it. It sounds simple, but it was a wonderful discovery: so also was that which shortly presented himself to himself as something immeasurably small and insignificant, the result of a first experience on the open sea. On land he had had his own little place, which he could always shift at will: here his will was the will of the mutable waters which bore him helpless on their surface. The feeling had a little shocked him in its first realisation; but he had quickly come to appreciate it at its better worth. He had nothing any longer to fret or worry him, because it was quite useless to fret or feel anxiety about anything. As an individual responsible to himself for his actions he had ceased to count; the whole business of himself had been taken over by Destiny. All sense of care seemed to slip away wonderfully under that conviction, he felt in a manner the joy of one suddenly disembodied.

They weighed and sailed on that bright morning of the 9th April, seven of them in all, to wit the *Tiger*

of 140 tons, which was the Admiral's ship, the *Roebuck*, a fly-boat of like burden, but built for speed and narrow waters, the *Lion* of 100 tons, the *Elizabeth* of 50, and a barque, the *Dorothy*, with a couple of small pinnaces for light work. Strictly, it was Sir Walter's most personal adventure, he chiefly financing it and supplying the majority of the craft; but for reasons already given he did not accompany his own enterprise, though he was there to cheer it on its way. He had come down into that part of the county to attend the wedding of the Mayor of Plymouth—no less a man than the great Francis Drake himself, who had just seized an interval in his abounding duties to marry, for his second wife, the young Mistress Sydenham, heiress to a knightly Somersetshire family—and had taken advantage of his proximity to Plymouth to kill two birds with one stone. He had a great confidence in his brother-in-law, Sir Richard Grenville, to whom he had deputed the command of the expedition, and bade Brion observe him for his excellences as a navigator and a leader of men combined, which made him the ideal character for such an undertaking. All which Brion was quite ready to believe, without unduly criticizing the qualities which made a man what he was; and, indeed, if Sir Richard's tongue was rough to brutality, he kept the smooth side of it in a quite wonderful way for the young man, for whom he seemed to entertain a curious liking, the first of which he showed by nominating both him and Clerivault to a berth on his own flag-ship, which was a roomy vessel for those days, and well appointed, though lacking in much of the luxury which was an ostentation with some of the famous captains of the time. Even the incomparable Drake had not been

guiltless of it, and the Admiral used to inveigh with a fierce scorn against the silver-engraved plate, and the demulcent lutes and violins, and the silken cushions and stifling perfumes with which that mighty sailor had thought fit to furnish his cabin in the *Pelican*. There were no perfumes on the *Tiger*, save of burning gunpowder; but sharp claws and fierce colouring, as was martial and fitting. She carried ten guns a side, and two on her upper deck, and was ready for her spring at any time, though not an ounce of silver adorned either her table or her musket-locks. Music there might be in moderation, since you could not keep natural songsters from singing; but Grenville would have none of it in his own quarters, not even on the offer of young Anthony Russe, who was a gentleman adventurer like Brion, and had a voice like a merry bird's. He was a captivating young fellow, was this Anthony, one of the few whom Brion had already met in London, and the two soon attached themselves to one another and became fast friends. Attachment, indeed, was a common condition of that life, for what with the colonists, who numbered 108 males in all, and with the crews, and supervisors, and fighting men, the vessels had all that they could pack, though the Admiral's ship was less crowded than the others. But, fortunately for comfort, the voyage was destined to be, almost from start to finish, a prosperous one, and the only sharp storm they encountered was early met with and soon weathered. They caught it in the Bay of Portugal, which they had reached in three days from the start with a fair following wind, and Brion and Master Anthony were sick and sorry youths until they had rendered unto Cæsar the things

that were Cæsar's, and emerged vacant but happy from that chastening ordeal. Thereafter a smooth run of a couple of days brought them to the Canaries, whence they shaped their course south-west for the little Antilles and the island of Dominica, which they made on the seventh of May, after a happy but eventless passage across the Atlantic.

All this, the sights and sounds, the abounding freedom of the life, the foreign ports and foreign people, was to Brion, after the somewhat narrow restrictions of his custom, an incessant novelty and delight. Only one thing so far was wanting to his and to the general content—they had encountered no Spaniard with whom to pick a quarrel on any or no terms, and plain sailing, though pleasant enough in itself, was mere mariners' satisfaction without that crowning grace to spice it.

This shocking lack of trouble was a subject for discussion one evening between the two young gentlemen, when the fleet had just sailed from Dominica on a north-westerly course. They sat high on the poop-deck where the great horn lanterns were, and in dolefully sarcastic vein acclaimed the perfections of the peace which surrounded them. It was a heavenly evening, indeed; born of the dreams of the south sea, whose bosom, like the bosom of the sleeping beauty, placidly rose and fell to her 'tender-taken breath': a dream of crystal air and golden water; of a sun hanging like a bubble of blown amber above the Western horizon; of a surface so still that the ships in their deep reflections seemed as if melting and dissolving into the placid fire which they rode, with scarce enough way on them to keep their steersmen awake. Brion

and Master Anthony had supped exuberantly, and, after the way of youth under such circumstances, were in voluble mood. They had come up on deck to escape the reek of the confined cabin, where the Admiral's company, professional and civilian, still hung about the table over their wine. Anthony had his lute with him, and thrummed it indifferently to extempore recitative or broken scraps of song.

"' In December " (sang he) " when the days draw to be short,
After November, when the nights wax noisome and long;
As I past by a place privily at a port,
I saw one sit by himself making a song."'

'What about?' said Brion.

'About the beauties of a quiet life, to be sure,' answered the musician. 'Do you not thank your stars for them? I met our general this morning. " Sir," says I, " we should be your grateful servants." " For what?" says he. " For taking us from the fighting turmoil of our civil lives," says I, " and showing us the blessings of a bloodless tranquillity."'

'And what did he answer?'

'Why, I blush for him. He said that if I was looking for trouble he could accommodate me then and there. Poor little Tony!

"His last talk of trifles, who told with his tongue
That few were fast i' the faith. I freyned that freak,
Whether he wanted wit, or some had done him wrong.
He said, he was little John Nobody, that durst not speak."'

'Well, are you not hard to please?'

'Don't ask me. I am little John Nobody that durst not speak.'

'What is it you want?'

'Never mind. I am little John Nobody that durst not speak.'

'*Is* it trouble?'

'No, peace, of course. But then I am little John Nobody.

"When Captains Courageous, whom death could not daunt,
Did march to the siege of the City of Gaunt,
They mustred their soldiers by two and by three,
And the foremost in battle was Mary Ambree."

But I durst not speak.'

A dark form came up the stairs, and stood lankly silhouetted against the glowing sky.

'Is that you, Master Clerivault?' asked the singer. 'Is not this peace a lovely thing?'

'A lovely thing, Sir.'

'We are well rewarded in it for our enterprise?'

'Very well rewarded, Sir.'

'And, so it could last continually, we might count ourselves the very blest of Providence?'

'God's 'slid, Sir—I think so.'

'Look you, Master Clerivault! is not that a Spanish sail under the sun?'

Clerivault spun round. Brion scrambled to his feet:—

'Where, Tony—where, o' God's name?'

'No, I was mistaken: it was a mosquito on my nose. But, how thankful we should be!'

Brion threw himself upon him and the two struggled

and rolled on the deck together. Presently Tony emerged, and, sitting up dishevelled, blew out an eldritch shriek, at the moment that a party, coming from the cabin, set foot on the poop.

'Who was that?' said Grenville's deep voice.

''Twas little Johnny Nobody,' murmured the culprit.

'O! it's you, Master Russe,' said the General. 'Still looking for trouble?'

'No, he has just found it, Sir Richard,' said Brion. 'A mosquito hath bit his nose.'

Grenville gave a gruff laugh:—

'All that? By the token, a prick from a Spanish-pike should bring a cry from him to split our mainsail.'

But he liked the boy well enough, and could appreciate at its worth the spirit which chafed under such tame inaction.

Still the fine weather held, while they ran up the Leeward Islands under a halcyon sky, making for St John's, in the Virgin group, where was reported to be a Spanish settlement. On the 10th May they dropped anchor under the green shores of a little island called Cotesa, a day's run from St John's, and there landed, rejoiced to stretch their cramped limbs, and spent the day in rest and pleasant feasting; whence, resuming their course on the 12th they reached St John's itself, and coming to anchor in a small bay of the island, called the Bay of Mosquitos, at a falcon's shot from the beach, prepared for the first time for a show of business. Here the best part of the company, going ashore, engaged to throw up a temporary fort, in view of any possible mischief which might be designed them, seeing the nature of their mission, and how the Spaniards, deeming themselves owners of the New

World, might desire to nip in the bud any such invasion of their self-elected privileges. And here Brion got his first true estimate of the forceful and tyrannical character of their commander; for Sir Richard, the moment hard action was called for, neither spared nor considered his men at anything less than the utmost which by oaths and violence he could wring out of them. Despatch was necessary, and despatch he would have, even to the exhaustion in such tropic heat of many of the crew. But the result was he got his fort built timely—though much of the wood for it had to be felled and fetched on trucks from a point three miles and more inland—and all the while till it was finished not a Spaniard showed his face. It was set against the estuary of a shallow river which here ran into the sea, and, having its back to the ocean, was encompassed on its two remaining sides with thick woodland. And now, his fort once completed, Sir Richard began to put into effect a design of his, which was to fashion within its shelter yet a third pinnace out of the timber brought down; which was done in something over ten days, and fitted and launched.

During all this time, until the 24th of the month, on which day the company departed from the island, only desultory acquaintance with the Spanish settlers was made. On the 16th there appeared for the first time a party of eight of them, horsemen, who rode out of the woods, and halted at a quarter mile distance to survey the fort; but on ten shot of the Admiral's force being detached to approach them, they wheeled and galloped away.

Six days later again a body numbering twenty mounted Spaniards appeared on the other side of the

river; seeing whom Sir Richard despatched a score of footmen to oppose them, together with two mounted on a couple of horses which had been found and seized on the island. And these two were no other than our young gallants, to whom had been deputed the glad task of leadership in a possible fray.

'Look for trouble, but invite it not,' were Sir Richard's sole directions; and the couple went off rejoicing, proud of the trust committed to them, and so far resolved, within discretion, not to abuse it. But at the very outset their hearts fell, for there were the Spaniards already showing a flag of truce, and making signs for a parley.

'They will not fight,' said Brion, 'unless by our will.'

'I am little Johnny Nobody, and in your hands,' said Tony.

Two of the Spaniards rode out upon the sands, where the river ran thin and scattered, and Brion and his companion pricked over to meet them. They were typical Southerners, lean and hot-eyed as hawks, but lavish in the sort of courtly ceremonial which precedes a duel to the death with rapiers. One of them spoke quite good English, and it was he addressed himself to the strangers. He opened with elaborate salutations :—

'Greetings, senores. We make you many welcome to St John's.'

Brion thanked him, with a return of his courtesy.

'We take your welcome in good part, Sir,' said he.

'Ah!' said the Spaniard; 'but not in the best part, since you come to fortify against us in our own land.'

'It is the mosquitos we wanted to keep out,' said Brion politely. 'They are very fierce in this island of yours, Sir.'

Young Russe could not repress a small explosion; but the Spaniard remained as solemn as a church.

'It is not well, senor,' he said, 'so to requite our hospitality.'

'It is the first we have heard of it,' said Brion. 'May I ask, senor, does it extend to supplying us with some things of which we stand in need—fresh meat and water among others?'

'If I say no, senor, you will seize these things by force, is it so?'

'The answer, I am afraid, senor, is that we shall.'

The Spaniard considered gravely.

'*Bien está*,' he said at last. 'We will supply you then all you want, and without delaying. I go, senor, to make the instant provision.'

He bowed profoundly, and drew on his rein.

'Why wouldn't the hidalgo fight?' said Russe discontentedly as they rode back.

'I wouldn't answer for him yet,' said Brion.

The General received their report with a grumph, which might have meant satisfaction or incredulity. He bided his time, it seemed. On the following day the new pinnace was launched; and the day after, having in the meanwhile heard or seen nothing of the Spaniards, he marched a considerable company some four miles into the country, to discover, if he might, the reason of the delay; when, failing to obtain any sort of report or satisfaction, out of revenge for the bad faith kept, he fired all the woods thereabouts—which Brion thought privily a mean and senseless action—and so returned to the fort, which he fired also, thereafter re-embarking all his force in preparation to sail the next morning, which was done.

And now, as if in truth Honour gave into his hands the means by which to retaliate on that abuse of her, about evening of the same day they fell in with a Spanish frigate, which, having approached cautiously, they discovered to be abandoned of her crew in a panic at the mere sight of the English flotilla, so that she fell an easy prize to the Admiral: and so was she scarce seized and manned when early in the following morning a second frigate was seen and overtaken, and surrendered without a blow, being found richly freighted, and with some passengers of account in her, who were presently fain to pay ransom in a good round sum for the privilege of their being set ashore on St John's. Sir Richard despatched these to the island, in one of the new-taken vessels, under custody of Master Ralph Lane—who was the Governor appointed for the forthcoming colony —with orders to this his Lieutenant to proceed to Roxo Bay, on the south-west side, and thence procure salt, of which the fleet stood in need. Which, under the guidance of a Spanish pilot seized on the frigate, Master Lane successfully accomplished, landing on the sands, with a party of twenty men, and immediately entrenching himself about one of the salt-hills, from which he took as much as he required. While so at work a great troop of Spaniards, both horse and foot, came down above the shore as if to dispute the appropriation. But it seemed they durst not advance any further, but contented themselves with watching the spoliation at a distance, and making menacing gestures which counted for nothing. Yet were they in number more than two to one, and many of them mounted, which set Brion, who had been allowed, on his own earnest solicitation, to join this little

subsidiary expedition, thinking of what it was that constituted a conquering race. An Englishman, he observed, dared in proportion as the odds were against him, while a Spaniard would dare nothing unless the odds were overwhelmingly in his favour.

He and his friend were by now in a state of high excitement over the turn of events, and looked from this time to taking nothing less than a ship a day. But in that, alas! they were doomed to disappointment; for, so it happened, only once more in all the voyage were they destined to encounter a Spanish vessel, and then to such sorrowful result as regarded Brion's happiness that he would have given all the fortune of the past to avert this one blow, could he have foreseen it.

In the meantime, and lacking any signal adventure to recount, the record of the voyage must be condensed. Generally, so far as impressions were concerned, it was to the young traveller one glowing panorama of hot fertile lands and strange races; of aromatic foliage and splendid flowers and luscious fruits; of maize, millet, cassava, plantains, cocoa-nuts, mangoes, yams and pineapples; of game and fish in prodigious abundance; of tropical heats and the ugly sweltering things engendered of them—scorpions, and great toads and lizards, and the malignant mosquitos, which had signalised their departure from St John's with such an attack in force as had completely routed the invaders, and sent them at the last flying for their ships as if the fourth plague of Egypt were let loose on them.

On the first day of June they came to the great island of Hispaniola, or Little Spain, and, coasting along its northern shore, cast anchor off Isabella, which was the seat of the Spanish settlement, and sent up courteously

to notify the Governor of their arrival. Who, having received flattering reports of the General's chivalry and hospitality to sundry of his countrymen who had been entertained by him, presently, in a day or two, came down to the shore with a score of his gentlemen, with their negroes and servants and a corpulent Spanish priest, all being ready to exchange amenities with the strangers, and to eschew as for the occasion the least thought of mistrust or hostility. And if, on the Spaniard's part, that was to make a virtue of necessity, certainly they made it, and with a handsome grace and dignity which were all their own, not even being impaired by the sight of the prizes which lay off the shore in full view for any who might to remark. But gentleman fraternised with gentleman, and fellow with fellow, and harmony was the order of the day. The sailors built two spacious bowers of green branches, and thereunder entertained the Spaniards to the best the ships could afford; which the priest found so well, indeed, that under the influence of a ben-bowse, as the seamen called it, he offered to absolve every heretic of them all, and afterwards fell asleep with his head in a dish of custard. After the feast, the Spaniards, not to be outdone in civility, organised a hunt for their visitors, mounting such as would on good horses, and having a herd of white bulls driven down from the hills, from which they selected three that offered good sport. These then they chased for a space of three hours, when all were killed, whereafter the whole company went to rest and wine, well satisfied. An exchange of gifts followed, many handsome presents being bestowed on either side; and on the following day ensued the more serious business of barter, the Englishmen

acquiring by way of truck or purchase a quantity of live-stock, besides sugar, ginger, pearls, and some bales of the tobacco then first coming into vogue.

So, with seeming goodwill, whatever secret passions underlay these courtesies, the last compliments were paid, and on the seventh of the month the fleet weighed and departed.

The next day nearly saw the end of the Admiral and some others, among whom were Brion and young Russe, with him. For having rowed in one of the pinnaces to a little island reported to contain seals, they were capsized, trying to land, in the heavy surf, and only escaped through the boat fortuitously righting itself at the critical moment. Thence, still keeping a north-westerly course, they touched at Caicos in the Bahamas, and afterwards at various small islands, until, on the 20th, they fell in with the main of Florida. Sailing therefrom up the coast, on the 23rd, the wind rising with a rough gray sea, they came to within an ace of being wrecked on the point known as Cape Fear, but more by good luck than good seamanship weathered the promontory, and ran to smooth anchorage in a little harbour beyond, which was so full of fish that the morning following, the wind and sea having abated in the interval, as many were caught in one tide as would have supplied all London for a week. And so, two days later, they sighted the land of North Carolina, as it was presently to be called, and running up in shoal water under slack sail to the island of Roanoke, which lay like a long reef or rampart to the main, cast anchor off a place called Wococon, and knew the first part of their business successfully accomplished.

The rest, from Brion's point of view, appeared all a grotesque gallanty-show, in which the pieces and the action moved according to some fantastic law having no known relation to a man's normal experiences. It was an absorbing, yet, somehow, an unearthly dream of expeditions made in the ships' boats up steaming rivers to barbarous kraals miscalled towns; of oily brick-red skins clothed in hides like chasubles; of beads and wampum; of mahogany-faced warriors, and squaws with their long black hair bound in chaplets of white coral, and carcanets of pearls, sometimes, hanging from the lobes of their ears; of councils and calumets and pow-wows and tomtoms. The ostensible object of all the palaver was to flatter the local monarch, one Wingina, into suffering the settlement within his territory of a band of foreign interlopers, and so consolidating a sort of provisional agreement said to have been made with him by the Captains Amadas and Barlowe who had conducted the expedition of the year before. It was an early example, in fact, of the peaceful penetration which has not the least intention of taking no for an answer, and was characterised by all the blunders common to that state of mind. The force which was resolved to insist had not the wit to disguise itself, and at the first sign of opposition betrayed its real purpose. It happened in this way. The expedition inland in the boats, which were four in number, and all fully manned, armed, and victualled for a week's trip, came by the so-called towns of Pomeiok, Aquascogok and Secotan, and was well entertained by the savages in all places. But it so happened that, at the second-named, a silver cup belonging to the Admiral was stolen by a redskin, and not being delivered to him, as he

had demanded, on his return, Sir Richard, in his swift, relentless way, burned and spoiled the town and the crops standing about it, so that the place was made a waste and all its people fled. Now the savages had hitherto behaved with great forbearance and hospitality, so that hardly a day passed but what they had brought for the fleet offerings of fat bucks, conies, hares, fish, and divers gourds and fruits, and this was their return. What could they think, then, of the true meaning of this 'peaceful penetration,' but that it was the first insidious step towards their own ousting and perhaps extermination? The consequences were what any but a blunder-headed martinet might have foreseen. So long as the show of force remained to overawe them, the natives maintained an hypocritical attitude of friendliness and conciliation; the moment the same was withdrawn, they vented their spite and fury upon the colonists remaining, so starving and harassing them that the poor men were glad to seize an opportunity to escape at the end of a year, while some subsequent attempts by others to procure a footing in the land met with even worse disaster, all engaged in them being attacked by the savages and miserably slain, only their bones remaining stark on the beach to witness to their fate.

Brion, who with his friend and Clerivault was present at that deed of wanton destruction, had the sense and the humanity to deplore its folly as much as its wickedness.

'It is not so,' he said, 'that we shall establish our lady's fame for reason and sweet justice. He wrongs us as much as the land he misrepresents.'

'We shall leave but footprints of sorrow where we

came with palms of love,' said Clerivault, in a melancholy voice. 'May God forgive us!'

'And these poor devils, the colonists,' quoth Master Russe, 'who will have to reap what we have sown.'

However, the mischief was done, and no talking could mend it. Its immediate effect, even, was to produce in the savages an increased show of deference and propitiation, of the sort wholly to deceive so poor a psychologist as the Admiral. He imagined them definitely cowed, and on that supposition acted with an arrogance which hitherto he had made shift to repress. The rest of the history of the expedition consisted of establishing the colonists in the land, with the stores and victuals brought for their accommodation; of cruisings and explorations up and down the coast; of interviews with the king's brother, Grangino, and of one with Wingina himself, whom the Admiral, taking a strong escort with him, travelled to see in his own savage capital of Weapomeiok. Brion was not invited to this excursion; but he had plenty otherwise to engage and interest him in the way of divers sport on land and water, and of keenly observing and studying the habits and customs of the strange people among whom a curious fate had cast him.

So the time of their stay drew to an end, being from first to last two whole months while they lay and cruised off the coast; and on the 25th August the *Tiger*, much lightened, weighed anchor—the rest of the fleet having been sent on some twenty days ahead—and set her sails for home.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TAKING OF THE CARACK

'WHAT ails thee, melancholy wight?'

Brion gazed, with that smiling question, into Clerivault's eyes. The ship was six days out on the broad Atlantic, running before a westerly breeze in hazy weather, and they looked over the gray unpeopled waste of waters and thought of home.

Clerivault heaved up his lean shoulders with a sort of renunciatory sigh.

'Nothing ails me, sweetheart—and yet nothing may be a sad complaint.'

'I'faith you're cryptic. How does this illness of nothing take you?'

'In the heart, Sir. It is a void, a blankness, an unfulfilment. It is the word for wasted opportunities, for frustrate hopes, for the thing that should have been but was not. I have known it much infecting the Law; and it may be I carried the seed of it in me to curse our high emprise.'

'What stuff is this?'

'Is it stuff?'

'Fustian, I doubt not. Come, sad soul'—he put a hand cheerily on the poor fellow's shoulder—'be of good heart. These are empty humours, that come of nothing. The seed in thee was never no man's curse.'

Clerivault shook his head. For some days past he had been in a curiously dejected mood, silent and low-

spirited. Often Brion had caught him with his eyes fixed upon him in a yearning wistful way, the meaning of which he could in no wise interpret. But it made him uneasy. Was the dear man sickening for something, he wondered? The thought gave him a queer turn. He had never even put to himself what the loss of Clerivault might, would mean to him; he had never so much as associated the image of death with that tough, wiry constitution. Nor would he now: merely to think of it seemed to bring the Impossible within the bounds of startling Possibility.

'You do not feel ill, do you,' he asked anxiously—'in body, I mean?'

'Never sounder, Sir.'

'Then, what sick fancy is this? Has our enterprise proved a failure? Ask our Admiral what he thinks of it.'

The wild eyes opened at that, with a spark of fury in them.

'Hark ye, Sir. His England is not my England. I'll not take his word for that success. What blows we have struck have been against, not for, *my* England. Will her gentle heart not hate me for it?'

'O, Clerivault, my dear! I see what haunts your mind. Well, we took no hand in those same felon blows.'

'Should we not have rather—to counter and invalidate them?'

'Ay, if we were resolved to meet with Master Doughty's fate.'

'So would our England at least have known us for her true lovers; so would the professed passion of our hearts for her have been vindicated. Now I return to

her in shame, a discredited champion, whom she will never wish to trust again.'

'O, this is foolish! What could we do in reason but what we have done? Treachery to our friends would not have sweetened England's name.'

The paragon sighed profoundly.

'That may be so,' said he: 'yet would I fain have struck one blow for her in our own right way, though I died for it.'

'No need to talk of dying.'

'What; would you miss me, sweetheart?'

'Peace, thou dear old croaker!'

'And my good master would miss me. Sometimes I think we should never have left him.'

Brion frowned. Those words touched a certain disquiet which had already more than once come to darken his own mind.

'Well,' he said, a little fretfully, 'not the Fates can make us walk in our own footsteps backwards. If we have done wrong, we are speeding to retrieve it.'

'Nay'—the eyes softened lovingly—'I meant no blame to thee, sweetling. Yet that is a strange thought of thine. Is Death indeed returning to that home of Time from which we started; and Hell, perhaps, retracing all our sins in loathing of them?'

The look-out in the foretop shouted suddenly a sail. The two started and turned to the loud cry: and there, forged unexpectedly out of the mists on their larboard bow, rode a huge carack. She was so close, within a mile or two, that it seemed she must have blundered half-asleep into their ken; or perhaps, like some majestic leviathan, had disdained to alter her course for such insignificant fry. She swam as if deep-laden, flying

the Spanish colours, and her burden was 300 tons, if an ounce.

In a moment the *Tiger's* deck was swarming, and the Admiral's orders issued sharp and violent. He grunted with satisfaction, rubbing his hands. Here was amends for much inglorious trafficing for one who, according to a contemporary chronicler, was 'very unquiet in his mind, and greatly affected to war,' and who would always rather, in a question of acquisition, plunder than barter. Nor were those he commanded less excited over the prospect than himself. At a breath all peevish humours were forgotten, all mortuary moods and talk of death and failure. The light of battle sprang to Clerivault's eyes; with a silent clap of his hand on Brion's shoulder, he hurried below to equip himself for the coming fray. Russe passed him, hastening to his friend's side. 'Good sooth, a monster!' he said: 'and with a double row of teeth, like a shark. There will be some credit in capturing *her*.' He never doubted the issue. It was the spirit destined to wrest from the Spaniard his long undisputed sovereignty of the seas.

They luffed and made for the stranger, overhauling her hand over hand. In the light wind blowing they sailed two knots for her one. Every soul on board stood at the prick of expectancy; each gunner waited at his piece, linstock in hand. At long range they bore up and held away, running parallel with, but a little abaft, the carack, which kept her course, as if in stately indifference. At that distance she towered above them, a very behemoth of the deep. Suddenly there was a double flash from her sides, a slam, and a rending crash. A spout of splinters went up from the *Tiger*, almost under Brion's feet, it seemed. A human scream

or two, mingling horribly with the uproar, for an instant rocked his heart; and then fury and fire, as if over some damnable wickedness, blazed in his blood. He saw red, and screeched with frenzied triumph as the *Tiger*, shooting abeam of the other, ran up her blazing ensign, and simultaneously delivered her whole larboard broadside into the quivering hull of the monster; then yawed, and, letting the enemy forge ahead, passed under her stern, and gave her the other broadside full through her cabin windows, raking her fore and aft, and making her stagger as if she had struck on a rock.

And now was witnessed an example of the tactics which afterwards came to be used to such profit in the English game of sea-war; the nimble-heeled *Tiger* manœuvring so deftly about her unwieldy adversary as to allow her no breathing time for reflection, or power to shift her range, so that most of her shots, sped wildly, flew over her indefatigable tormentor, or, at best, smacked through her rigging, while every broadside driven home into herself tore her vitals to pieces. It was the game of the whale and sword-fish—seamanship versus mere weight of wood and metal, and had the inevitable ending. In the thick of the fury, when coming about for another swoop and stab, a roaring cheer went up from the *Tiger*; and there was the Spaniard's ensign fluttering down, and the mighty prize was won.

As the noise subsided, the Admiral bade Master Thomas Candish, who was his shipmaster, to put his helm up and slip under the quarter of the carack; and thereat a lamentable discovery was made. For it appeared that the very last shot which the enemy had fired had carried away the best part of the *Tiger's* rudder,

so that she would not answer to her helm, and was become virtually unmanageable. Slowly, as the reek and fume of the guns dissipated, the ships fell apart—*and the Tiger had not a boat left to her name.* The Admiral stamped and swore like a maniac. By God, he would not lose her, though every member of the crew had to swim to take possession. He cursed in a very frenzy, striding up and down the deck, like some maddened marooned thing, watching the distance widen—when someone had an inspiration. Why not an extempore raft? He jumped at the suggestion, roaring at the man who had spoken to start and give effect to his idea, instead of gaping there like a bran-stuffed quocker-wodger. In a moment planks and empty chests were being hurried up, and lowered into the water, and bound into some hasty semblance of a raft. It was a crazy insecure contrivance, but enough for the temper of the moment. Before it was well finished Sir Richard was on board, and Brion and Tony had tumbled down beside him. A score of others followed, and the frail craft put off, urged on its way by hurriedly improvised sweeps. The waves jeered at and buffeted it, it laboured and wallowed; but still it made way. If the Spaniards had had any evil left in them, they might have sunk it with a single shot. But they had lost, it seemed, all stomach for the fight. The ridiculous thing lobbed on, sluggish and scarce manageable. It began to gape and cast its lashings—still it lobbed on. Its boards were actually parting as it drifted, rather than was directed, against the Spaniard's side, and ropes and ladders were lowered for its crew to board by. To such a right and chastened frame of mind had terror of English guns and seamanship brought the once overbearing Don.

The prize proved to be the *Santa Anna*, homeward bound from Hispaniola, with a full cargo of mahogany, dye-woods and cotton, and carrying also a quantity of pearls and specie—altogether a very valuable seizure. She was in a dreadful state from the guns—dead and mangled bodies lying everywhere, and all the splendour of her interior fabric knocked into blackened splinters. The sight revolted Brion, and cured for the time being his battle-fever. But he was not allowed long to be affected by it, for the Admiral sent him off in one of the ship's boats to desire Mr Candish to take command of the *Tiger* during his absence, for that he himself purposed to remain on the prize and navigate her into port. The young man was glad to escape, and without stipulating that he should be permitted to return and rejoin his leader on the *Santa Anna*. He preferred the thought of the *Tiger*, even without the companionship of Anthony Russe.

He had boarded, and given his message to the ship-master, when some one came to him to say that Master Clerivault, who had been wounded in the fight and lay below, was incessantly crying for him, and that if he wished to see the man alive he had better come at once.

An instant hand of ice seemed laid on Brion's heart. He stared as if he were the victim of some shocking insult. In the fury of the contest he had lost all sense of individuality or personal association: he had not given one thought to Clerivault since that cry of the fore-topman had sent them apart to prepare for the crash. Since, if he had assumed anything, it was that his old friend and comrade was somewhere near him, following in his footsteps, sharing his blood-drunken enthusiasm. And instead——

All the melancholy and foreboding of the last few days rushed back upon him with overwhelming force. To this it had tended, then; thither had the fatal finger, that he would not recognize, been pointing all the time. With a long-drawn gasp, he motioned to his informant, and the two hurried below together.

They had laid him on a table in the forecastle, near by where he had received his injury. It had come with the first guns fired, and the cry shocked from him had been one of those which had sickened Brion's senses. To think of it!—to think of it! And he had gone on his way unheeding. A round shot had shattered all the poor creature's lower body, and only a little space of time remained to him. He had passed long ago, but for the will in him to live to see his darling. He greeted Brion's appearance with a white and ghastly smile. They had covered his lower limbs with a cloak: he was from the first beyond the reach of their rough surgery.

With hot and burning eyes the young man stooped over his friend, and took and pressed one chilling hand to his breast.

'Clerivault!' he whispered.

He would not ask him not to go and leave him, lest it should but add a futile pang to that mortal passing. The blue lips moved, and he bent to them.

'Lower, sweetheart.'

'Here, Clerivault.'

'Lower—I had much to say—but there is only a moment—left. I must use it—to confess.'

'What, dear?'

'Is it only you that hears? I have—lied to you.'

'How?'

'I am not really—of English blood—I have not a drop of it—in my veins.'

'Dear Clerivault; I knew. What then?'

'You knew? And yet—would let me speak—for England—claim—to represent her?'

'O, Clerivault, Clerivault! Whatever your blood, you have an English heart You have loved England and died for her. Now are you for ever more one of her dearest sons.'

A radiance came into the fading eyes; the dying man rose with a sudden powerful effort from his pillow. 'England!' he cried hoarsely. A rush of blood rumbled from his mouth, and he fell back dead.

. . . . . .

They dropped him the next day into the blue sea, with a shot at his feet. Brion looked on with tearless eyes and a numbed brain. It was all right, he supposed, and they could do nothing else; but he wished they had lashed them together first, and ended the whole business then and there. He had a curious feeling of being half-dead himself, as if a moiety of his vitality had been withdrawn with that dear inseparable comrade. How could he ever care for life again without Clerivault? His love, and now his friend? Surely Destiny had dealt with him unduly at so early an age. He was sad and alone—no longer with any definite object in the world.

So he thought in his unhappiness, poor soul. He had gone forth so radiantly, and only, after all, to find Desolation. With that he was returning to face the desolate house, his home; with that to vindicate his desertion of a trust and duty. His dead comrade's words returned upon him with a pitiful force which

shook his heart. Ought he to have allowed himself to be tempted away? A fever was upon him all at once to be back in England—in Devonshire; a mad longing to cancel the intervening space which lay between him and surety.

So, in his loneliness and despair, there returned to him, and with a wonderful new sense of restfulness, a thought which had already half troubled, half bewitched his mind. He knew in what soft and gentle bosom he could find, if he would, the welcome and the comradeship his soul so longed for. Why not abandon the struggle, yield for once and for all his scruples, and so turn the tables on the fate which had thought finally to bereave him? The very reflection was balm out of sickness. It steadied the agitation of his nerves and induced in him a feeling of tranquil resignation. Thenceforth the turmoil in his mind subsided, and he set himself to face with sober philosophy the weary days of the voyage which yet lay before him. He was no longer in any hurry to reach home; which testified to the rationality of his resolve, if it did not to any compelling force of passion behind it.

Until the 10th September the *Tiger* and the *Santa Anna* ran in company; when, foul weather intervening, they were cast apart, and the lighter ship so gained on the other as quickly to lose sight of her in the murk. Nor was she to see her again during the remainder of the run, which for her part she completed some twelve days ahead of her consort. Of this time there is nothing of interest to record; the finish of the voyage was uneventful, and on the 6th of October the *Tiger* fell in with the Land's End, and the same day cast anchor at Falmouth, where Brion parted from her, and went ashore.

It was six months near to a day since he had left his native land; and with what varied emotions he set foot again on her dear soil may be imagined. He made no stay in the town—which indeed was little better than a fishing colony—but took boat that afternoon for Plymouth, where he was to put up for the night before completing the rest of his journey, which he was resolved to do on the morrow. Only he did not. Something intervened.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE VIPER ON THE HEARTH

WHETHER or not the vulnerary water distilled from the plantain in the year of its becoming a bird possessed the phœnix-like properties attributed to it by its concoctor, certain it is that from the moment of Mrs Harlock's taking the stranger in hand the man's hurts began to mend; and within a month of his being received into the house he was pronounced by his attendant in a fit state to take himself out of it. He demurred over the verdict, protesting that only his own resolution and desire to appear grateful were feigning a cure which in his inner self he knew to be far from assured; but his precise plaints, after a private consultation among the conspirators, were ignored, and he was given definite notice that, as from the first day of May, he was to consider them discharged of any further obligations regarding him, and must make his plans accordingly. He submitted perforce, and, it is to be assumed, took them at their word, for his plans, when he came to develop them, showed a full appreciation of the independence of action presented to him, and were very certainly his own. He went—but only to return.

During those weeks of his convalescence no least hint of his presence in the Grange had been allowed to percolate through to its master, who, indeed, more than ever since his nephew's departure, had shut himself away in complete isolation from his household.

Nor had a whisper of the secret the place contained been let penetrate to the outer world. Absolute loyalty to their service was, as Brion had very well known, an assured asset with those faithful souls, and observance to the letter of his instructions could be depended on. So rigidly, indeed, had his directions been followed that from first to last the invalid had been able to inform himself in no solitary particular of the constitution of the household into which he had been admitted. He knew from Brion the name of its head, and that was all. That, it may be said, had conveyed something to him, but something which required substantiation and consideration. The question was, how to bring about, what he most desired, a personal interview. It was already, to his mind, a sheer Providence which had brought him, though by way of travail, to a house actually marked for early visitation on his list. For there is need no longer to skirmish about the truth regarding Master John Melton. He was in very fact one of those *agents provocateurs* already alluded to as being sent by the Jesuit Allen to England to test popular feeling and sow sedition. Not in Orders himself, he was possessed, nevertheless, of sufficient dogmatism to qualify him for such a mission, his English blood further suiting him for the task. He was, moreover, a dry and crafty creature, born for an Inquisitor. Part of his business was to analyse the sources of disaffection, and to involve such waverers as he could in the conspiracy against the Queen's life, which even then was germinating in the breasts of certain Catholic extremists. Among such presumptive confederates, it seemed, the name of Quentin Bagott figured as that of one who had secretly recanted his heresy, and might be

used as a local agent for the insidious dissemination of treason. How the information had been acquired is of little matter; it was of a piece with much that jumped to certain conclusions from insufficient premises. In any case a visit to the ex-Judge had been assigned a foremost place in the itinerary mapped out for Allen's emissary.

And here he was, by a very Providence, as has been said—inscrutably severe in its methods though it might be—actually on the premises which he might in vain have sought to enter lacking that Divine castigation. It seemed incredible that his good fortune stood to be stultified through the perversity of a party of fools, too obstinately loyal to their instructions to give him the least tether for his operations. Nor should it be —on that he was determined—whatever close watch they kept over their tongues, or over his movements when once he was in a condition to rise and creep about his room. He was able to learn so much—that he owed this rigid supervision to the man who had rescued him, and could form, perhaps, his own shrewd conclusions as to some of Brion's reasons for desiring to keep him and his Uncle apart. For this Melton was as sharp as a ferret, and had that sort of microscopic mental eye which can discover whole truths in grains of unconsidered suggestion. So, when the time came, he went, quite quietly and tamely, and his watchers breathed a sigh of relief that their responsibility was at an end.

That same night Quentin Bagott was sitting in his chamber alone. A solitary lamp burned over his head, diluting but not obliterating a patch of moonlight which fell through the open casement upon the floor.

The window looked out upon the waste ground to the rear of the Grange, and was flung wide, for the night was still and warm. He sat, his eyes fixed on the carpet, on the patch of moonlight there, drearily hypnotised by it. There was a criss-cross pattern in it which seemed to entangle his brain. Wrenching himself once free from the obsession, he turned to the table to drink, and again came round to stare at the carpet. Something had happened to it. In the thick of the moonlit lattice lay a folded scrap of paper which had not been there before. It looked as if entangled in the meshes—or in his brain. He sat staring at it, trying to think. Suddenly he rose unsteadily, and stooped, and gained the thing, and unfolded it and read. He stood a long time reading; then went softly and quickly to the window and bent out.

'*Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas*,' he said low into the night.

A man came out of the shadows and approached the window.

'*Et circumdabo altare tuum, Domine*,' he responded, small and quiet.

'Whence come you—and wherefore?' asked Bagott in a fearful voice.

'From Heaven—for your salvation,' was the solemn answer.

So, by way of the main gate, and the tree across the moat, had Melton achieved his purpose. He had simply 'evacuated' to order, had gone straight round by the copse, and had lain hidden all day in the secret place of which only he knew. Then at night he had emerged, and by good fortune had reached his quarry.

He was never again to drop what he had seized until

he had sucked it dry. From that moment he had the sodden and bewildered brain at his mercy. By what specious arts he had prevailed could never afterwards be known; but somehow, working upon his victim's superstitious fears, he ended by establishing a complete control over him. He was to go brazenly about it, too, never before witnesses so much as hinting at the question of religion, but letting it be assumed that the tie between him and Bagott was purely one of mutual liking and good-will. In all this he was guided by a very definite purpose, which only ultimately came to light. Whatever at the outset might have been the singleness of his motives, temptation changed it into one of gripping and savage cupidity. He had suddenly seen his way to the acquisition of unexpected wealth, and the prospect was too much for his caution. He dared to stake on the chance, and he came within an ace of succeeding.

As to the tricked and jockeyed household, the knowledge of their humiliation came soon enough to them. It synchronised with the arrival before his master's door of Nol porter, prepared to perform at the usual hour his usual bedtime duties. He heard voices speaking within, and stood stupefied to listen; then heaved away on creaking boot-tips to call Phineas. The master-cook came. 'Anan?' said he.

'Hist!' whispered Nol: 'Put thy ear hither, and tell me. Who is it?'

Phineas listened, and came about, his long face aghast.

'John Melton,' said he.

Nol stared a moment; then, his jaw set grim, opened the door and walked into the room. His master sat facing him; the stranger stood by the table, a thin,

wintry, but wholly unperturbed smile upon his lips.

'*Soyez le bienvenu !*' he murmured, with an indrawn snigger.

Nol made an ugly gesture :—

'Out of this you go !' said he.

The stranger just glanced at his host. Bagott half rose in his chair, his eyes red with fury :—

'Away, thou dog, thou villain !' he roared. 'What; you'd so dare to my guest, and before my face ! I'll requite thee, dog !'

He rocked and panted, mouthing like a mad thing.

''Twas Master Brion's order,' said Nol sulkily.

The Judge banged his fist on the table.

'Who is master here, thou beast? Disobey me at thy peril. I have not yet so abrogated my authority' —he made a sudden effort to command himself; and went on in a quieter voice, which yet shook with agitation : 'Master Brion judged within the limits of his knowledge, which was not all, nor near all. I have learned the whole truth from this gentleman, who indeed was on his way to visit me when that misfortune befell him. My nephew did well and prudently, acting for the best; and you did well to follow his instructions. But that is done. Henceforth this becomes *my* guest, whom I commit to your duty to serve and honour. Attend to it well.'

He sank back in his chair, waving the two from the room, and with dismay at their hearts they left him. What was to be done? Nothing that they could see. They were on the horns of as bitter a dilemma as could have perplexed two honest, troubled heads. They could not act in opposition to their lawful master :

they dared not make a public scandal of the business, lest its consequences should visit themselves on that loved but dishonoured head. There was nothing, for their part, but to continue to keep the fact of the stranger's presence in the house a secret from the world, and to abide whatever issue might arise, pending their young lord's return. How the man had succeeded in procuring that interview was a mystery to them; but they had done their part faithfully, and were not in any way to blame for the miscarriage of their plans.

Thence ensued a strange glooming time, which, running into months, was destined to culminate in nothing less than tragedy. The man remained on, an accepted inmate of the house, and steadily assuming a position of authority in it. Whatever moral hold he had acquired over the haunted mind of its master he used with crafty effect to advantage himself in the name of the Cause. He was served, as directed, but with a sullenness and repressed hostility which he did not fail to note and record. After all, he had the courage of his qualities, and was playing a desperate game, whose success depended upon the audacity of the 'bluff' he could bring to bear upon it.

Still time—being, in the commercial sense, of the essence of the contract—had to be considered in the maturation of his designs. An inopportune return of the nephew might upset all his calculations, and what was to be done must be done unhurriedly but promptly. However he went about his work, he went about it effectively, approaching his end step by step. It became soon enough apparent that Quentin Bagott was falling under the complete domination of this interloper, whom he had taken to his heart and confidence. He

deferred to him, clung to him, gave it to be understood that he had delegated to him his own authority in domestic matters, to issue what directions he thought fit. The household accepted the situation, with a sort of mutinous resignation to a state of things they could not help; but evil was in their hearts. It seemed to them that their master was yielding the last remains of his vitality to this sinister, thin-lipped bloodsucker; that, under the dark influence to which he had succumbed, he was waxing steadily in feebleness and dependence. There came a time when he would hardly allow John Melton out of his sight, holding to him as if upon him alone depended his own last hope of moral and material safety. It was strange and pitiful; but worse was to follow.

One day Nol was called in by his master, and instructed by him to ride into Ashburton with a note to a certain scrivener and attorney, much in demand locally, requesting that gentleman to attend, with his clerk, at the Grange at his early convenience. The two came, and had been closeted with their client but a brief time, when Nol and Phineas were ordered into the presence. They came, wondering, to find the men of law standing at the table, their master sunk into the great chair where he habitually sat, and Melton withdrawn into the window, where he stood viewing the waste prospect, as if wholly absorbed in it.

Quentin Bagott regarded the newcomers, as they entered, from deep eyes sunk in hollow sockets. He looked wasted and exhausted; but his voice, when he spoke, measured out its words as if he had rehearsed them all carefully beforehand. He held a document, which he lifted and tapped in a slow feeble way.

'Listen,' he said. 'I have sent for ye two to mark and digest the substance of that which is in my hand. It is my last Will and testament, drawn up by me, a lawyer, revoking all former Wills, duly executed, and witnessed by these two in whose presence I have attached my signature. Would ye, who cannot read, know what are its terms? They are briefly stated. To my dear friend, John Melton, I give and bequeath unconditionally all this messuage and dwelling-house known as the Moated Grange, to do and devise with it, his heirs and assigns, as shall be his pleasure from the date of my death thenceforth. And I ask him, if he will, and so he survive me, to continue to employ and make provision for such of my good and faithful retainers as shall be in my service at the time.'

Mr Melton turned in his place at the window, and bent to a little dry bow, silently acquiescing. No one might have guessed from his sober manner the cold jubilation which was thrilling his breast. He had won to the anteroom of that for which, during these long months, he had been steadily scheming with all the craft and finesse at his command, and it would be his own fault now if he failed in the final fruition of his hopes. But poor rueful Nol cared nothing for that provision affecting his own well-being. He stood all amazed, understanding only enough of the legal jargon to gather that it deposed his young lord from his full and equitable rights. Fairly blubbering, he threw himself on his knees before the Judge, and bellowed out a protest :—

'Don't do it, Sir. Think of our poor young master!'

Bagott regarded the suppliant without animus. He even smiled indulgently on him.

'I have not forgotten him, good Nol,' he said. 'The residue of the estate is his—of more independent value to a young man than this hampering property ever would or could be. I have not forgotten him, my good, faithful fellow.'

But Nol would not be comforted. 'Wait till he returns, good master,' he cried. 'Think again once and twice before you do it.'

'I have thought a thousand times,' answered Bagott, still with a strange mildness, 'and always to the same end. None of you knows, none of you can know, all that I owe to this my friend, since he came to fill the vacant place caused by another's secession.'

'He hath corrupt your mind,' cried Nol despairingly.

'Harkee, good man,' answered his master: 'I bear with you because I love you. I love you all, who have served me so long and singly; and because of my love I would have you abet, not balk me in a step my very conscience demands. Come, Nol, come Phineas, please your old master by pleasing him who will one day take his place, it may be in no great time.'

That set Nol howling; but it conquered him, poor simple soul. He swore, and Phineas swore, that they would all, answering for the others, try to act up to their lord's wishes, and so they stumbled out. When they were gone, Bagott produced wine, with which he regaled the mildewed men of law—too accustomed, like undertakers, to the laying-out and burying of human hopes to be in any way affected by the grief they had witnessed, but flattered over their employment by so great a lawyer—and, having presently got rid of them, turned to his inseparable companion, and said pantingly, as he placed the Will in his hands:—

'In trust, then, Melton, for the future, when the true faith is restored to our land, and the seminary we wot of shall form itself within these desolate walls, and the Chapel be reconsecrated to the service of the holy Mass.'

Significant words, betraying something of the trend of recent events.

'I accept the trust,' said Melton simply, as he received the document—'*in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*' But the thought beneath the words ran as thus: 'Hot hands. He will be the worse for this rally. How long? Will he last till the nephew's return? The worse for me: but even then, not failure. We must pile on the fuel.'

'Bagott,' he said aloud; 'this effort has been too much for you. You must take means to restore the vital spark, or I will not answer for the consequences.'

He poured liberally from a flask, while the other watched him with a sort of dull, exhausted eagerness; and once, twice, thrice he poured again—and so gained his end.

'You drunken dog,' he said to the insensible figure. 'Will you never die?'

Three weeks later Nol, being called in betimes to support his master to his bedchamber, and having hard ado, despite his great strength, to keep the almost inert form from slipping to the floor, paused at the first landing to breathe himself before proceeding. As he stood for a moment, with a sudden convulsive wrench Bagott stiffened his whole body, tore free, and swaying one instant, before the other could clutch at him, went down, and rolled crashing from the stair-head into the hall. When they picked him up he was dead.

CHAPTER XXX

L'ALLEGRO

To the market-place of Plymouth, up in the high town, twice a week the country folk brought their produce, consisting of eggs and fresh butter, great jars of scalded cream, fat ducks and capons, brawn in marbled columns, apples by the barrel, and vegetables, such as were grown, by the crate. These were laid out on trestles, with alleys between, and thither flocked the housewives of every condition and age, the sedate on business bent, and the frivolous on enjoyment. It made an animated scene in the bright sunshine, to which Brion was irresistibly drawn. He had not cast his melancholy; but he felt it good to be among his own blossom-cheeked countrywomen again, and indeed to be alive; for after all he was young, and Youth finds it hard to resist the influences of jollity and fine weather. So he moved among the stalls, forgetful and happy for the time being, and leaving behind him, like a very human craft, a swell of soft bosoms and following eyes, that dwelt tenderly on the passing of a form so gallant and a face so manly attractive—but of all that he was unconscious.

'Come buy, come buy,' cried a shrill buxom dame, presiding over a counter of gingerbread, and speaking across the shoulder of a young woman, who, busy with her purse, stood with her back to Brion.

'Alack, I lack a ha'penny, mother,' answered a soft

voice, 'to buy me my gingerbread ship withal. So I must e'en go fasting for to-day.'

She *seemed* a comely young woman, judging by what is not always to be trusted, the human reverse. She had a quantity of bright hair, insufficiently confined within a little staid Puritanical coif, which released certain tendrils of it to nestle in the nape of a neck like ivory. She wore a dress of plain stone blue, with a short white linen tippet about her shoulders, and might have been a country wench, were it not for the smooth delicacy of her skin, and some quality in her voice which spoke of a better refinement. A small basket hung on her arm, and she looked into it.

'I'faith,' she said, with a little crow, and producing the coin, 'it is here after all. I cried out, mother, before my chickens were hatched.'

Brion gasped, and stood as if stricken. What was this wonder—this delirious wonder? A sob—laughter —were in his throat together. As the vendee, having received her gingerbread ship and placed it in her basket, went off down the alley, he followed in pursuit, stumbling, half blind. She passed out into the sunlight and he after. He had not yet seen her face, but he looked for tell-tale characteristics, agonised for them, and, identifying them, as he believed, felt a very sickness of joy. She walked like one who *did not love violent exercise* for its own sake; there was a tranquil placidity in her movements; he thought of the white rabbit he had once possessed, 'warm and soft and cuddlesome,' and felt a thrill in his arms. She turned into a quiet street, going down-hill towards the Hoe, and he was closing on her. She seemed to become conscious of his pursuit, for her steps suddenly faltered, hesitated and

slowed down, as if to let him pass. But he did not pass, and she turned, a shadow of apprehension in her eyes; she turned—and stopped.

He uttered a little irresistible cry :—

'Joan—Joan ! O, after all these years !'

She stood looking wide-eyed at him, as if he were an apparition; but she did not speak—a woman where had been a child; ripeness where had been promise. Yet he would have laughed to scorn the thought of one doubt possessing his heart. How could it, seeing that her image had never ceased to dwell there?

'Do you not know me?' he pleaded. Drollery quivered in him. 'One does not cry out,' he said, 'before one's chickens are hatched. The moment I heard that, " Joan for a ducat ! " says I; and without your turning I knew you.'

He searched her face, grown in knowledge and in sweet self-consciousness; but unchanged in its flower-like complexion, its dear blue eyes, its straight level brows : he searched it, pleading for recognition and remembrance, and, searching, there suddenly were the little flickering betraying dimples at the wings of the short nose.

'Ah ! you do know me?' he said, with a great jubilant sigh. 'Say who I am, Joan.'

'Brion,' she half whispered, and something seemed to throb in her white throat.

'Yes, Brion, Joan. How sweet it is to hear my name upon your lips again ! Is not this wonderful? Come where we can talk in quiet. We have such thousands of things to tell one another. What are you doing with gingerbread ships at your age?'

He laughed, and choked, and bantered, dancing with excitement.

'I was going to eat it on the Hoe,' she said. 'I have eaten one near every week since you sailed away in a ship. I used to eat men.'

'What is that? How did you know I sailed?'

'I was on the Quay. I saw you go down to the boat. I was sure it was you; and then I heard one point to you by name.'

'And you were so close, and I never guessed! Curst fortune, that; but never mind, since I have found you. Six months ago it was, Joan, and such things have happened to me, wonderful and sad. I am only this moment returned—but yesterday. But we will speak of all that anon. It is not the first, nor best nor worst, of what we have to say. Where have you been all these long years? And did you in truth eat a gingerbread ship every week in pretty pledge to me, you dear? My thoughts and words tumble over one another. They all push to be first out, because I am wild with such joy. Come where we can be quiet. Your colour comes and goes. Are you as madly happy as I am? Joan, had you never seen me once again since we parted, before that day of the sailing?'

'Never once, Brion.'

'Nor heard of me?'

'No, never.'

'Nor I of you. It near broke my heart. Well, where were you?'

'Here, in Plymouth.'

'My God! Not all the time?'

'Near all the time, indeed.'

'O, monstrous and incredible fate! So near and

yet so divorced! And to think of all the suffering of these years! Who brought you here?'

''Twas a maiden sister of Sir John's. She had me to live with her after his death, and I am with her still. She ought that duty, she believed, to him and me.'

'And she loves you, Joan?'

'Not greatly, Brion, I fear. She loves atonement.'

'For what?'

The girl was silent, hanging her head a little.

'Ah!' said Brion. 'Well, sit thee down.'

She was glad to do so, being more overcome than her looks confessed. They had found a warm grassy hollow, overlooking the Sound, where they could rest and talk without fear of interruption. Joan sat clasping her hands about her knees—a characteristic position which Brion observed with a laughing bliss. He flung himself beside her, and, resting on his elbow, feasted and feasted his starved eyes on all that recovered dearness.

'You are not changed in the least,' he said—'only taller and a little fuller. You are one of those, I think, Joan, who hang at lovely ripeness all their lives.'

A faint pink mantled her cheek. She turned to him with a caressing reproof:—

'I am a woman now, Brion. It is not right you should speak to me so. And you have grown too, and into a fine man. I think you very handsome.'

'Do you?' He laughed. 'Why don't you eat your gingerbread?'

'I don't think I want it now.'

'Let us share it together, and be shipmates.'

'Very well.'

They broke and munched—or pretended to. They

were both far too agitated to eat. 'I have seen squawks, real squawks, since last we met,' he said; and then suddenly, recalling the association the word conveyed, his eyes filled with gravity.

'Now, tell me, Joan,' he said, 'why does this lady not love you?'

He sought to take her hand in his, but she would not let him.

'I would not meet their wishes,' she said, in a low voice. 'That is one reason why.'

'What wishes?'

She looked him full in the face without answering.

'Ah!' he cried: 'the suitor failed?'

'He was fat and mottled like a toad,' she said pleadingly. 'He was Sir John's, my father's, shipping-agent.'

He conned her queerly, and a little sadly.

'Your father's, Joan? Do you still say so?'

'Why should I not?' she answered, wondering. 'I don't understand you.'

'Joan, do you remember that first day we met in the beautiful glen?'

'Yes, Brion.'

'And you said, as we parted, that I had guessed your secret.'

'Brion, I never did. I remember every word. I said "Have you guessed my secret?" Which was not to say you had.'

'That is but a quibble, after all. Why would you not be candid with me?'

She dropped her lids, plucking at the blades of grass, in a way which recalled, O, so pathetically, the sorrow of an earlier day.

'I'faith and in truth I *am* Joan, Brion,' she said piteously.

'What, two Joan Medleys?'

'Yes, two Joans. I cannot help it if my mother named me so.'

'Your mother? She would have two daughters named Joan?'

'Nay, but one. It was my father had the two.'

She raised the blue eyes, with a line of appealing pain between them, to his. O, *will* you not understand? they said.

'Joan!' whispered Brion, in a voice of amazed comprehension: 'are you—are *you* a "bustard" too?'

She did not answer, and he heaved himself a thought nearer her.'

'You poor dear! And I never thought or guessed, blockhead that I am. Why, to be sure'—he laid a compassionate hand on her arm. 'Did you never know *her*, Joan?'

The girl shook her head.

'Only in dreams. I think she died very young.'

'Like mine. O, Joan! were we not guided by these two to meet one another? I think we need not have feared the spirits of the ilex grove. Tell me, dear'—he pressed closer, and laid his cheek coaxingly against the soft shoulder; and she flushed, but suffered him—even leaned a little, irresistibly, towards the caress. 'I have been longing, yet agonising, from the first to put one question to you—just one. Joan—you are still unwed?'

Looking straight before her, she whispered yes—it stood to reason.

'Why?' he asked rapturously.

'If you do not know, Brion, how can I tell you?'

Every nerve in his body thrilled with ecstasy.

'You need not,' he said. 'I hide my eyes before such loving constancy—I will, Joan, yes, I will, in your hair, in your neck. O, how could I ever have doubted you, my own maid!'

'Did you doubt me, Brion?'

'The way of parting has been long, sweetheart, and sometimes unhappy; but it finds me at the blissful end, as at the beginning, thy maiden knight. Yet there have been moments when despair and loneliness —O, Joan! will you forgive me, not that I broke my plight, but that ever I thought I could?'

'Poor boy! It is different with a man.'

'You sweet! Then, sometimes, thinking you—what I thought you, it seemed a mad presumption on my part—O, I have such a tale to tell you, Joan! But now, two nameless things together——'

'It was that, Brion, which made me afraid to set you right. I thought, if you knew the truth, you would not want to love me any more.'

'What has loving *you* to do with titles? A man, save his veins were arctic ice, could love and desire you for your own self, I think. Did your father treat you kindly?'

'He had not been unkind, I trow, unless for my lady sister, who liked me not. He gave me my little Gritty. O, Brion, the day I had to go, and could not keep my tryst! He was ever so in his decisions, sudden and inexorable. I thought I should have wept myself to death.'

She turned to him, bewildered even with the memory: he held out passionate arms, unable to contain himself longer.

'Come to your true-mate, pretty bird—Nay, I will have you. O, darling, after all these years—ten, if a day, Joan—and I have all that hunger to make good!'

'O, forbear, Brion! We shall be seen. O, I love you so.' And then, all rosy and ruffled, she looked up in his face, and said, as she had said once before, so quaintly and trustingly: 'Will you marry me, Brion?'

He laughed with joy.

'How can such constancy live in such lovely kindness? Is it all for me—all? If I said no, Joan, would you love me still?'

'Yes, Brion.'

'Did ever "yes" sigh so sweetly from troubled lips! Shall we go to the church now?'

'I would we might.'

'Why not? I have friends of weight here. Hist, Joan—shall we, in good sooth? Are we not ten years betrothed, to justify a little haste at the end? Will you meet me again this afternoon?'

She whispered that she would, ashamed, now she had spoken, of her forwardness. The poor child had suffered in these years, made the bait and foil of a frigid and intolerant Pharisaism. The Mistress Medley who had undertaken her charge had never ceased to point in her the moral of ungodly appetites, or to hold her responsible, as it were, for her father's sin. She had led a dull, disregarded life—on a penny a week pocket money—and could have suffered it only, as she told Brion, on the sure conviction that he would return to her some day. In that faith she had never wavered; it had kept her heart alive, and supported her through every desolate tribulation.

And Brion, remembering his own errant thoughts,

bowed ashamed before that whole-hearted fidelity. He could not give his tender maid enough love and fondling, but longed only for the moment when she should be secured to him, with nothing but death ever again to part them. They talked together yet awhile before they separated, for of what, in simple volume, had they not to deliver their souls—explanation, story, confession, all the crowded details of that long interval? Yet the stupendous thing of all was that their idyll, begun in the perfection of blossom, was about to consummate itself in the perfection of fruit. None could look at them, lovely things, and doubt it, and not envy either.

Brion sought and found an accommodating chaplain —a jolly fellow, whom he had already met, the eve before his sailing, in Raleigh's company. The pleasant cleric, very willing to oblige the friend of so great a friend, made no demur, was willing to take his handsome fee and eschew ceremonial, and in fact bound the couple man and wife that very afternoon in his own parlour. It was the merest formality, like signing a deed of gift to one already in possession of the property: and so, I think, the two regarded it. They had always been one.

Then Brion, resolute to finish the business offhand, took his young bride to lodgings prepared for her, while he went alone to face the old harpy, her kinswoman, with the deed they had done. He went, armed with indignation and authority, to the handsome dwelling overlooking Sutton Pool and the Catwater where the abhorrent spinster lived, and saw her, and delivered himself. There was a scene. It seemed Mistress Medley knew of the ex-Judge by name, and held him in loathing as a reputed Papish recusant. She heaped terms of

foulest abuse on Quentin Bagott's head and on his house, which was already, she was rejoiced to know —if rumours which had been wafted across the moor were to be trusted—approaching the retribution which its iniquities deserved, and a choice example of which was to witness in this deed of infamy wrought by one of its nameless scions. Seduction and defilement, she was pleased to say, were natural to one bred in that atmosphere, and the will to surrender to them as natural in a child of Shame. But, as the girl had chosen her bed, so might she lie in it. For her part, she had only to declare that from that moment she cast the graceless bastard from her door, and desired never to see her face again.

And then Brion spoke, in his quiet level way, in which, however, he could be pretty poisonous when he chose. He began by putting the lady right on certain points. Seduction, he said, was always a jealous term in the mouths of those whose unwomanliness had never had reason to fear it, and whose spite, it seemed, could go so far as to apply it to the very Sacrament of Wedlock. And as to children of shame, said he, the shame was in those who made and kept them so, and the truer justice in his opinion would be to disinherit the father who begot a child unlawfully, and endow with his forfeited name that innocent victim of his wrong-doing. ''Tis ever,' he went on, 'old loveless virginity that most hates the child of love; but to do it in the name of religion is a beastly Pharisaism. Go on thy knees to Heaven, old woman, and pray it forgive thee for thy harsh and narrow persecution of one entrusted by it to thee as an instrument of atonement for a wickedness perpetrated. Remember, 'twas Fortune, not thine

own virtue, gave thee a name, else had thou stood a sorry chance of any. And now I have but this to say. I shake, on my Joan's behalf, the dust of this cruel bondage from my feet. She leaves it joyously for one pledged long years ago, and now confirmed by Heaven's sanction. And with that I end.'

He did, and gained the street unhurried, leaving behind him a picture of such baffled and speechless venom as, when he came to recall it, made him shake with laughter. For, the business once accomplished, he had no mind to let its memory disturb him, but recaptured at once all that mood of exultant rapture to which it had been but a brief disagreeable interlude. It had left him all he sought and desired, absolute independent possession of the sweetest wife in the world. Only one thing remained to cloud his thoughts with some shadowy disquiet—that triumphant allusion to disturbances threatening across the moors. Was it true, and could it be possible they had the Grange for their objective? Remembering his own uneasiness before he left, and the precautions he had taken, he could not but feel a certain inquietude. At the same time he trusted to Raleigh's promise to nip any such demonstrations, should they occur, in the bud. But he felt it necessary to the setting of his mind at rest to go at once. He and Joan must bid good-bye to Plymouth on the morrow.

And so, having resolved, he abandoned himself to the happiness of the moment. It seemed too stupendously incredible that after all these weary years of separation he and Joan were found, rejoined and wedded, and all in one day. Yes, wedded—the mad, preposterous thing! He chuckled in mere helpless ecstasy to think of it.

CHAPTER XXXI

'BACK TO A WORLD OF DEATH'

THEY had taken horse for the moors all in the sweet sunrise, for Brion had set his heart on going round by the Glen, which would mean a thirty mile ride in all, and it was necessary for them to start with the dawn. And sure no sweeter Eos than this young bride of a night could have brought the morning over the hills, or given assurance of a lovelier day to come. She wore the rose of shy fulfilment in her cheek, and the heaven of happiness in her eyes; and Love went with her, beating his golden fans against the streaming air, and the purple blossom of the heather rose about her horse's pasterns, trying to kiss her feet. She had deserved all her rapture for her faith, and, better, that test of womanliness, which was to prove her not only a thing for man's joy, but for his support and refuge in affliction.

They stopped mid-way to water at a little spring, and eat the fruit and cakes they had brought with them; then pushed on and, gaining the heavenly glen about mid-day, tethered their horses to a tree, and in the soft October stillness climbed the side of the hill, and reached the bower. And there, as he had predetermined, Brion knelt at his dear love's knee, and confessed, what he had hitherto withheld, the name of his sore temptation.

And she held him to her, stroking his hair and temples,

yielding wholly to him the passion which the memories of that fragrant isolation stirred beyond repression.

'My king, my love,' she whispered: 'it is only for poor Alse I sorrow—not thy thought. Could I grudge thee that, and not wrong her, who after all had the first claim on thee? And that dear Clerivault that so loved and desired her for thee. He knew what was right and honourable. How can I of myself ever make good to thee that bitter loss?'

'My Joan,' he said: 'no loss to me in all the world could ever be like to that of losing thee; and no recovery so perfect. I am resigned to meeting Harlequin in Heaven: no Joan would have satisfied my endless longing but Joan on earth.'

A while they dwelt there in the bliss of kisses and soft speech; and then, at last, with a sigh, Brion rose and cried they must be going.

'For home,' he said—'home with Joan: we are bringing our idyll home. We know not what awaits us, girl; but what we carry with us in ourselves, that must we find there. It will suffice us, whatever haps.'

They climbed down hand in hand, and regaining their cropping steeds, mounted and rode on. It took them no long while to cover the remaining distance, and by two o'clock they were entering into the first of the track which led towards the Moated Grange. As they drew near the point where its chimneys would first come into sight, a flutter of emotions arose in Brion's breast. How was he returning, and to what, after six months' silence and separation from these old familiar scenes? And with a wife no one of them knew or guessed? A sudden shyness of the explanatory rôle he had to play, in the midst of welcome and excitement,

seized on him like a paralysis. Yet he felt no doubt as to Joan's reception: they would all love her for his sake, and not least his Uncle, to whom her gentle winsome presence would appeal like sunshine breaking out of long storm.

The afternoon was very still and hazy, with a curious vaporous closeness in it, which seemed to meet their faces in hot whiffs, as when one stands near a wind-swayed bonfire. Brion sniffed, raising his head.

'What is that?' said he. 'Are they burning heather? My faith, it is sultry here; and the insects they so hum and drone, one might be in a wood instead of the open. And yet 'tis not like insects neither.'

The murmur, or clamour, whatever it was, appeared all in front of them, and to swell in volume as they advanced. They could see nothing beyond the sloping track before them, and the trees which topped it. As they reached these, Brion pulled on his rein, bidding his companion stop.

'Listen!' he said.

The noise, with their reaching the level ground, had sensibly increased, as when a swell is opened in an organ. Busy, multitudinous, inarticulate, it seemed as if compounded of a confusion of human voices, and cracking whips, and hissing kettles, their shrill spasmodic utterance perpetually punctuating a dull booming roar which never ceased; but all in a minor key, as though subdued by distance, and the closeness of the high trees which here shut in the track.

'What is it, Brion?' whispered the girl fearfully.

Something caught the tail of his eye, and he looked up to see a drift of what he could not mistake scudding over the tree-tops.

'I don't know,' he said. His face was suddenly set like death. 'Stay where you are, Joan, while I go and see.'

He drove spurs into his horse, and, leaping forward, rushed the few score yards to the bend where the Grange would come into view. He was incredulous still: it would appear too impossible a devilry on the part of Fate to have struck this blow, and struck it coincidently with his return. Yet, even before he reached the bend, he knew that it was true—was true. The red sparkle of it, like a cluster of hellish jewels, blinked and snickered at him through the green leaves. And then the next moment he had broken into the open, and pulling up so sharply as almost to throw his horse back on its haunches, rose in his stirrups and saw. From base to attic the house was one streaming robe of flame.

CHAPTER XXXII

RETRIBUTION

WHEN the crowner, with his twelve good men and true —yokels, for the most part, drawn from the neighbouring farms—came to sit on the body of Quentin Bagott, Scrivener Harnett—he who had witnessed the Will—was present, as representing the interests of the heir to the estate. Evidence as to facts being incontestable, the jury, following the plain lead of their officer—himself a friend of the attorney—gave in their verdict to the effect that the deceased had died by the visitation of God, being a very stout gentleman and suspect of Popish inclinations; which rider, however, the crowner —at Master Harnett's instance—ruling to be irrelevant, it was omitted from the record, and the simple verdict left to stand.

Melton, indeed, had every reason for desiring to suppress any linking of the dead man's name with the recusancy associated with it, wishing it to be assumed that the intimacy between them, by which he had himself come unexpectedly to profit, had been one of pure, long-standing, social good-fellowship. The attorney, the inquest over, took particular pains, on his behalf, to convey that impression abroad, with the result that the situation, after serving for a local nine days' wonder, came generally to be accepted, and some hopes even to be entertained that the Grange, under its new ownership, might cease to be a focus for

suspicion and mystery. It seemed a hardship on the absent heir-presumptive; but, as to that, there was no telling, since all had been an enigma which passed behind those drear-shut walls; and for the rest the Law, which has made of Possession a fetish to awe the stoutest scepticism, was there to support its own most incontrovertible claims. So, all considered, it would be well, perhaps, thought popular opinion, to resign to peaceful and undisputed enjoyment of what he had gained, one, who, though a stranger, stood to his rights in the sacred name of Property.

So far so well for the cunning creature's schemes; but all this was only preliminary to his drawing of a much wider net about the waters in which he fished. In the meantime, planning to secure a greater privacy for his operations, he had taken the second step contemplated by him, and dismissed at a moment's notice the whole household—with a single exception. It was on the day of the funeral that he had done this, after the mortal remains of the ex-Judge had been taken to Ashburton, and put to rest for all time in a corner of the little old graveyard of St Lawrence's Chapel. The chaplain himself had come over to preface the obsequies with a little traditional ceremony which, under the circumstances, the good man thought advisable. He made no reflections, he said, but, in view of rumours which could not be altogether ignored, he judged it well, for the reconciling of his office with his conscience, and for the hopefuller salvation of an erring soul, to take the precaution. Wherefore, after seeing the coffin lifted out, and placed upon the cart which was to carry it, he stood before the house-door, and demanded in a loud voice to know if any there was so charitable

and so Christian as to take it upon himself to *eat the sins of the deceased*, pawning his own soul, as it were, for the ease and rest of the departed one. Whereat, after a pregnant pause, had come forward honest Nol the porter, and flamingly averred that he was prepared to undertake that pious task, saving the presumption of putting his own soul and that of his dear master's at a common valuation; and down he had sat upon the stool, or cricket, placed for him, and taking from the clergyman's hands the groat proffered him, and from Gammer Harlock's the crust of bread and the mazard-bowl of ale which were the symbols of the sacrifice, had then and there stoically consumed the food, and, washing it securely home in one great draught which emptied the bowl, had risen from the ceremony a refreshed but somewhat haunted man. He went with the body afterwards, with Phineas and William accompanying—Melton, for sufficient reasons, remaining behind; and, after the burying, the three, very sad and downcast, returned to the Grange, and were immediately summoned, together with Mrs Harlock, to the presence of him who was now their master. They obeyed, with a feeling of vague foreboding.

John Melton sat in the room which had been erst his host's and benefactor's. He looked at the four as they entered with a dry wintry smile. Beside his chair stood the attorney, a figure no less frosty in suggestion. There was not enough red blood between the two of them to have stained a counter, only the lips of both, and the crafty, slit eyelids of the attorney, showing a pale smear of red.

'I have sent for ye,' said Melton, in his arid, measured way, 'to the intent that ye shall know that from this

moment your services are dispensed with, and yourselves dismissed incontinent from the house, your packs taken with you and your wages paid in full.'

A moment's stupefaction fell upon the group at his words. It was not that those were unexpected, or indeed unwelcome: only faith to their promise had ever resigned them to the prospect of remaining on: but the harsh abruptness and perfidy of the deed was what took their breath away. Nol was the first to find his voice.

'Is this your promise to his Honour, ye dommed faith-breaker!' he bellowed, his face reddening with fury.

'There was no undertaking, save what was conditional on my will,' answered Melton, concise and clear; 'nor, since the subject was first mooted, has my will gathered from ye any inducement to consider your claims favourably. The head being gone, the body is best to follow. Shortly, if ye question the legality of the act, here is Master Harnett to answer to the law for it.'

The attorney bent, with a sound as if he creaked rustily at the waist.

'Answer to the devil!' cried Nol. 'Dost think, man, we wished to serve thee? 'Twas faith to his Honour bound us, as it binds not him that hath been a curse to this house ever since his black shadow crossed its threshold. But to dismiss us like this, and his Honour not an hour in his grave! Well, we'll go.'

'Yes, you'll go,' answered the other imperturbably, 'and not the slower for your insolence. Dare me, you rascal, and I'll bring the law on you.'

He spoke quite quietly and wickedly, a thin line of teeth showing between his lips. Nol stood staring

at him a moment, inexpressible emotions seething within his breast; then turned to the others :—

'Come Phineas, come Willy—we were best away, to bide our young master's return, sith in his absence this house is no longer a place for honest men.'

They were leaving the room, old Harlock following, when Melton called upon her to stay. She had been standing all this while, a silent inscrutable figure, somewhat apart, and now turned, hearing the summons.

'Ay. What is it, Melton?'

'I did not mean to include you in this dismissal.'

'Ay.'

'Think you I have no bowels of gratitude to the one that nursed me in my sickness and gave me back to health?'

'What is it ye want of me?'

'Your continuance in my service, that is all.'

'To cook your victuals, and make your bed, and give you what comfort a woman may?'

'Something to that effect.'

'And share your confidence, maybe?'

'Not to abuse it, at least.'

She stood staring at him a long while—so keenly that her dark piercing eyes seemed, like a burning-glass, to focus a spot of red even on his sallow cheek. And at last she spoke :—

'So be it, then. Of this house I have been, and am, and must ever be, until I perish with it, mayhap, off the face of the earth. So be it.'

She turned with the word, and, pushing before the others, left the room first. They shrunk from her, the dark old witch, holding that she but vindicated her title in this betrayal, for self-interest, of a trust. But

she cared nothing for their opinions or their repulsion, and, going before them, disappeared into her own quarters.

They delayed no long while after that about their leaving, but, their goods collected and their wages paid—scrupulously, and beyond contention, by the shrewd attorney—shouldered each his bundle and started on foot for Ashburton.

And so another step was gained, and Melton by so much, as he believed, nearer the achievement of his purpose. He had won at last the privacy he desired, and in that virtual solitude could go leisurely and deliberately about the maturation of his plans. Incontestably in legal possession, he no longer dreaded the nephew's return. If that should happen, he had only to show his warrant.

Now, having so triumphed, he began to linger over this fruition of his hopes, tasting its sweetness. Presently it began to occur to him whether, in contradiction of his real original design, he need leave the Grange at all, but instead settle down to a life of ease and comfort on the spot he had secured so cunningly for his own. That was a fatal thought to pet, inducing in him, as it did, a habit of procrastination. He savoured his days, which that gaunt old housekeeper helped to make curiously attractive to him. She cooked to perfection; she made him comfortable; she kept him in comparative luxury. And all the time he trusted to her stupidity to observe nothing and nurse no suspicions. He had no opinion of her mental faculties, which superstition, he opined, had credited with a sharpness they did not really possess. He thought her, in fact, an old melancholy fool, and it was merely for her usefulness that he

had retained her in his service, since he could not go altogether without domestic help.

And the grim warlock herself? She had seen straight enough into his reason for excepting her from the general clearance—and she was content. She knew his true opinion of her—and she was content. Let him trade upon it, cosset his delusions, and play her game. She, too, could plot, as secretly, as craftily, as deadly as himself, only with a brain less prone to the conceit of its own infallibility. Many wily schemes had gone to shipwreck on that conceit; and yet another was destined to go. He should see. When the time fell ripe, he should see.

It fell on a certain still close day in October, when a light stirless mist hung all about the house. There was nothing in the quiet, the loneliness, the glowing tranquillity of the place to presage the storm which was even then marching to burst over it. As it lay so seemingly secure in its green isolation, no hint of tramping footsteps, coming from two directions at once, found even the faintest echo on its walls. Yet the footsteps, or a section of them, were already beating out their ominous rhythm in the fierce dark old heart of her to whose long stealthy machinations, and final summons, they were conveying the fruitful answer. Once, and once again, she mounted to the roof, and, like Sister Ann, looked eastwards, towards Teignmouth and the sea, for the little expected cloud of dust. And the third time, descending, she went straight in to John Melton, where he sat in the great hall, ruminating, as was his wont after dinner, over one of the dead man's cherished volumes. The remains of the meal, though

long finished, still lay upon the table. He looked up, something fretfully, as the old woman entered.

'You are late,' he said. 'Clear this truck away.'

'Let it be,' she answered. 'Mayhap ye'll need no trencher again, but to lay with salt upon your breast. Have you said your grace, John Melton? I'd add a prayer to it, if I were you.'

She stood, lean, hawk-eyed, something suddenly sinister and formidable, gazing stilly at him, and, as motionless, he gazed up at her. Yet, quiet as he seemed, his heart was in a tumult. What did she mean? and had he been mistaken in her all this time—a viper, like himself, waiting to bite the hand that cherished her? Some prescience, shapeless but intolerable, seized on his nerves; and, before he could command himself, panic had stormed his reason. He rose quickly, the book crashing from his hands to the floor, and stood breathing like one who had lost a race. His lips worked, his eyes had livid circles about them; yet, when he spoke, very habit chilled his words.

'You mad old fool. What crazy fancy is this? Take the things away.'

'Never so mad,' she cried, 'as to accept your wage and do your service for love of ye. What! would ye fit all souls to your own pattern of treachery and ingratitude? That's where ye erred, John Melton, and for that ye'll have to pay.'

He was so amazed, so overwhelmed, in this revelation of a hateful terrific force, where he had looked for nothing but senility and lean subservience, that he had not a word to answer. And she went on:—

'A fool, was I? Yet not fool nor coward enough to stand unhelping by and see my pretty boy robbed of his

birthright. Ye did a bad day's work for yourself, when ye coerced that poor broken old man into the act ye did; ye set one on your track, then, John Melton, that would know no rest nor mercy till she had dragged ye down. Had ye so forgotten the gleam of the wolves' white teeth that chased ye hither over the moors? 'Twas you the fool that took the wise woman to housekeeper, thinking your hidden secret safe from her.'

He made a single spasmodic step forward.

'No!' he cried, as if very anguish had wrung the word from him.

'Ay!' she answered. 'And what is your secret worth to ye now? Listen!'

A sudden murmur in the air; a confused tramp of many feet; voices; sharp cries; a sense of contiguity to some great hostile presence—and silence. Swaying, as if drunk, he staggered to the window and looked out.

Fifty of them, if one—men such as those others—the same—rough fanatic seamen, the most of them—savages without reason or pity—wild cruel natures and inflamed with drink as with bigotry. They saw him, the white staring, horror-struck face, and a sudden roar went up from the crowd:—

'There he be—the Papish devil! We have un at last! Throw un out to us, Mother—throw un out!'

And in a moment there was frenzied tumult where had been whispering and cautious footsteps. Some rushed for the window; some the door; others scattered to invest the house and cut off all chance of escape; fists beat on panels; arms stiffened through iron bars, tugging to snap them. Yet through all there grew apparent one deadly purpose, swiftly concentrating itself about a certain spot in the courtyard. Thither

hurried forms in quick succession, bearing great masses of sticks and brushwood, heaps of straw, litter and fodder from the stables. They came and came again, never satisfied with the swelling sum, accumulating pile on pile, till a very hillock of fuel had risen before their eyes. Fuel! Great God! It was for the long-delayed holocaust; and the wretched man behind the window saw and understood.

The sill stood too far above their reach for easy gaining; the front door could offer a tough resistance to their battering strokes; he had yet some moments in which to think and act. Reeling back into the room, he felt thin arms, tense as wire, flung about him: and he was held.

'You devil!' he panted: 'let me go!'

She clung on, and, her face half buried against his shoulder, shrieked: 'He's here. Come and take him!'

Fighting like a madman, he forced her inch by inch towards the table, freed, with a frantic wrench, his right arm, and, finding a knife, gripped it and struck at her. A thin shrill whine issued from her lips, her arms relaxed, and she fell from him with a thud upon the floor.

Now! To think—to collect himself—to fight down this choking in his throat! If he could only once gain the well-house—the wheel—unobserved! His—Bagott's closet! He was there—rushing for the casement—and at the very moment blows came raining on it, and the glass crashed. Staggering back, a very extremity of horror paralysed his reason. No instinct remained to him but the last instinct of despair—to escape upwards, upwards, from the earth that had betrayed him. The stairs—on the stairs now—and

always frantically mounting them. The roof at last might give him safety.

And, even while he climbed, they were cutting off from beneath his feet his final hope of escape: and, even while he climbed, his Nemesis was toiling in his wake. She had heard him, and risen, ghastly and bloody, to her feet, and followed, dropping her own crimson trail, on his track.

It was the doom of both. For a cry had risen that the soldiers were coming, and that the work that was to do must be done after a more swift and comprehensive fashion than that designed, if the accursed spy was not to slip through their hands. He had vanished from the window: those few who had succeeded in forcing an entrance were still hurrying aimlessly hither and thither, in vain search of their prey. They were called out. Senseless, brutal in its destructive frenzy, the mob gave no thought but to the securing of its purpose by any foul reckless means; gave no thought to the safety of her, their own secret confederate and informer, who was still alive somewhere within the building. They formed a hasty cordon about the walls, and, carrying their massed fuel to a dozen kindling points, flung it in heaps through doors and windows and set fire to it.

And almost in a moment, incredible as it might seem, the place was alight and roaring. It had been a hot summer, the house was dry to its attics, and the old laths and timber caught like touchwood. In a few minutes it was blazing like a gorse-thicket: the pools of flame, like pools of quicksilver, touched and became one, which, involving the whole in one furious conflagration, went rushing up in a single cone of volcanic fire.

Soon the heat was so great that the crowd had to fall farther back to contemplate its own handiwork. Some, taking refuge in the shelter of the gateway, looked forth, half awed over the magnitude of their achievement. And, as they watched, suddenly there was a little figure on the roof, and it was throwing out its arms in a frantic appeal for the help that no power on earth could any longer afford it.

A sort of gloating sigh took the upturned faces like a wind; a pale fanatic creature screamed. The house by now was such a charred and crumbling ruin within the furnace that consumed it, it seemed impossible that any human being could find a foothold there. Was he going to take a last desperate chance by leaping from its walls? Even as they wondered, a second figure, a woman's, was seen on the roof. The other seemed to turn to it—to turn away—to make a movement to spring. Too late. The next moment she had seized it in her arms and dived with it into the roaring abyss of flame. A silence, as of riven air after a thunderclap, fell upon the people.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BEREAVEMENT

STUPEFIED, overwhelmed by the tragedy of the sight before him, Brion sat motionless a moment. Then aware, down the vista of the track, of a swarm of dark shapes issuing from the gate, with an oath he clapped spurs to his horse, and in one wild rush covered the distance.

Hangdog, threatening, sullen, loweringly defiant now the deed was done and themselves committed beyond recall, the mob stood to meet the onset, and to counter-strike if need be. He pulled up before them, his eyes blazing, his hands vicious on the reins.

'Ye bloody devils!' he roared. 'What deed is this and wherefore?' Then anguish caught at his heart in a sick spasm. 'My Uncle!' he cried—'Where is he? What have ye done to him?'

They were coming out by twos and threes, while the flames still crackled and reverberated behind them, tossing and devouring the last blazing sticks of ruin; they were coming in a haste now to get away before the soldiers arrived. Fear added to guilt sped their footsteps, and they were in no temper to be delayed. Some one bade him, with an ugly snarl, to stand away, whoever he was, if he valued his life.

'At a dozen of yours,' he cried, and swift as a flash his sword was in his hand. They fell from him, scowling,

while he faced them all. He heard a sound behind him, and looked round.

'Go back, Joan!' he cried—'Go back—do you hear?'

It was but an instant, but enough for their mood and purpose, and with a dash they were upon him. Trying to get play with his blade, a furious stroke from a cudgel broke it in his hand. His horse rearing at the same moment, and plunging wildly, cleared a space about him; but the next instant, slipping on a stone, it was down, and he with it. And as he fell, unhurt but helpless, there came a thud of hoofs, and the girl had pulled up between him and his assailants. Her cheek was flushed; her breast heaved.

'Dare, now!' she cried. 'I will know all your faces, and remember them.'

'Joan!' he commanded. He had staggered to his feet, and was tumultuously urging his horse to his. 'Go back—go away—and leave them to me!'

The mere shame of her womanhood had held them off for a moment: at Brion's words, with a deep growl of fury, they were beginning again to close in, when a sudden shout brought them to an instant stop:—

'The soldiers!'

And, even as they turned to scatter, there came wheeling with jingling harness round the western wall, which, with the booming flames, had muffled the sounds of their approach, a squad of stalwart troopers, a very cool and lordly young Ancient riding at their head. He opened his eyes with wonder on the scene before him, seemed to grasp in a measure its import, and, halting his troop, rode up to the couple and, doffing very courteously to the lady, expressed a hope that they two were not personally affected by this calamity,

which, unfortunately, too late information had made it impossible on his part to prevent; but for which full retribution, they might make very sure, would be exacted.

'Indeed, Sir,' answered Joan, a little wearily: 'that is well; yet while you talk they escape.'

He smiled superior. 'As the mouse escapes the cat. A little "law," as we call it, Madam, and then to round them up in the open. Believe me, if you have suffered at their hands——?' he paused significantly.

'Ask of my husband, Sir,' said Joan, with a fine blush. 'He hath but late returned from sailing overseas with Sir Richard Grenville, and to-day, but this moment, returning home, hath lighted on this welcome.'

The Ancient exclaimed, between interest and commiseration:—

'What, Master Middleton himself! This, Sir, is indeed a lamentable homing for you!'

Brion bowed mechanically. His eyes were wild, distracted. 'My Uncle?' he said feverishly: 'I must go seek him, find him. Mayhap he had warning to escape.'

He was making for the now emptied archway, through which the crashing embers of the fire shone as from a furnace door, when the young officer detained him, leaning from his horse:—

'Nay, do you not know?'

'Know what, Sir?'

'If 'tis of Master Bagott you speak, he is dead.'

'Dead!'

'Some weeks gone. He had an accident, falling from the stairs.'

Brion stood stupidly, as if he had not understood.

The Ancient nodded, and, some instinct of propriety in him judging it timely to withdraw, wheeled sharply and called up his troop. They answered, and like a clattering wind went past and disappeared round the eastern bend of the wall.

Still the young man stood motionless.

'Brion!' whispered a soft entreating voice. She had slipped from her saddle and come to him. He turned, with a sort of sob, and caught her to him, and held her convulsively against his breast.

'And you were so joyous, my own love,' she said pitifully.

He held her fiercely, passionately, to him:—

'And I am joyous still, Joan. Never think but that I am joyous still. What is this loss'—he tossed his head to the glowing wreck behind him—'to the immeasurable rapture of my gain. He is gone, all his weaknesses and his troubles at rest; and, for that, why should I, who loved him, repine? Only, what does this all mean, and, if not directed against him, against whom? Yet against whomsoever, the meaning is plain for one. Ah, my girl, so single-hearted and so brave, who takest the blow as all for me and none for thyself, who would have given thy dear, dear life for mine, dost thou realise to what we are saved together—the doom of poverty?'

'Nay, all the riches I ever asked was Brion.'

He stood up, with a great breath, and, his arm encircling her, bade her come with him and look upon their home. They went over the little bridge and through the gateway together, and peering thence, not venturing to push farther, saw the devastation. Flame and volumes of smoke still poured upwards

from the massed ruin, but through an empty shaft of blackened walls and tottering chimneys. In all the burning desolate place no corner remained to hang a memory on. He turned to her with a wistful smile :—

'Well, our love go with it, Joan. We must seek other lodgings for the night. But why, why, why, girl; and where are all they I left here—ah, to fear, to submit, and to make no fight to save it?'

It was a question so far unanswerable; yet not long before receiving a certain illumination. They went and sat upon a bank, awaiting the troop's return, and, while sitting there together, talked low of ancient days, and of the dead man, and of the future with its brave resolves: and, as they talked, suddenly there were the soldiers riding back, and a dozen of them with each a prisoner roped and running at his saddle-bow. They came past, these captives, sick and lead-faced, with all the evil knocked out of them, and, at the Ancient's word, were sent forward on the road to Ashburton, while he dismounted to inform the two of his success.

'We ran them down in the open,' said he, wiping his hot brow with a pretty cambric napkin—'and caught them scattered—a good fifty in all, vermin from the fishing ports. And some we thwacked, and the worst we bagged, and they will be made to answer for it. There was one, a pitiful, tallow-faced loon, that would turn Queen's evidence to save his skin.'

His eyes were all for Joan while he spoke—bold points of admiration.

'What evidence?' asked Brion quickly.

'Why, that these dogs were secretly inflamed and invited to the deed by one Warlock, or Harlock—an

old hag, acting housekeeper, it seems, to this Melton himself.'

'Melton!' exclaimed Brion in amazement.

'Ay, Melton. That was the name of him that had lived here since the Judge's death, and alone, 'twas said, with her that betrayed him. They both perished in the fire together.'

'What!' cried Brion—'perished! my poor old Harlock perished?'

He was so confounded and bewildered by the whole affair, that Joan begged the young officer to abandon the subject for the time being. And he very amiably acquiesced, suggesting that the best course would be for Brion to see and question the prisoner himself presently, and obtain from him what further evidence he might. Having decided which, he proposed that they should all ride for Ashburton together, to which the others agreeing, they mounted and left the melancholy scene without further delay.

The Ancient was garrulous by the way, opening out to Brion as being, though indirectly, one of Raleigh's men, like himself, and as such a comrade in arms. He was particular in describing how he had received directions from the Seneschal of the County of Exeter to keep a watch on the district; and how he had obeyed his instructions to such good effect, that the private news he had received had enabled him to ride from that city almost coincidently with the starting of the incendiaries from Teignmouth, when, could but a mile or two have been deducted from the total of fifteen or so he had had to traverse, he would have been able to forestall the catastrophe by a timely arrival. He was full of regrets for that, but clearly attributed his

failure to the unreasonable distance, and not to any miscalculation of his own. Having explained which, he turned to the subject of the voyage, in which he was truthfully much more interested than in this paltry local uprising, and asked Brion a thousand questions, which the poor fellow made shift in his distraction to answer to the best satisfaction he could.

As they neared Ashburton, they met many curious folks, who had got late wind of the business, hurrying out to visit the scene of the catastrophe; and the town itself, when they entered it, was seething with excitement over the prisoners just brought in. Brion, being recognised, evoked much wondering comment, and was glad when the inn was reached, and he could help down Joan, to take refuge with him in a private chamber. He was turning to enter, having delivered their horses to the hostler, when a great fellow, bursting his way through the onlookers, fell on his knees before him, and held up his clasped hands in a very agony of emotion.

'O, my young master!' cried the man—'O, my young master! To see you home again, and to this!'

Brion looked at him, with hardly less emotion.

'Why, Nol,' he said—'Nol! Methought you could not all have deserted me.'

Then, conscious of the listening throng, he bade the poor good creature to rise, and follow him into the house.

'Now,' said he, when they were all shut away into privacy: 'here at least is one witness that I need, and that will bring light to my beclouded soul.' Then, seeing the porter's inflamed eyes fixed in bewilderment on Joan: 'Ay, lad,' he said; 'it is a dear bride I have

brought home with me, and had thought to commit to all your love and service. But that is done.'

And that opened the floodgates.

'God bless her sweet face!' bellowed Nol; and then, in vociferous outcry: 'O, my pretty mistress, here be a home-coming indeed for 'ee!'

He had only just heard the news, it seemed, and had been about to run all the way to the Grange to verify it, when he had caught sight of his young master. And so, after a little, they reached the subject of all, and Brion learned what there was to learn of the happenings of the last six months—of his Uncle's violent death, and of the machinations which had preceded and followed it.

'A was a villain rogue, that Melton,' cried Nol, 'so to corrupt his Honour's mind.'

'To corrupt,' said Brion sadly. 'Ah, Nol! What were my orders?'

'We obeyed them, master,' cried the poor fellow eagerly, 'we obeyed them faithful and true we did, keeping watch on the man, and never leaving him, day or night, while a lay a'mending. And the moment a was fit to travel, out a was bundled. But a returned at night by some way unknown to us, and found his way in to his Honour, and from that time never left him.'

Some way unknown? Alas, could he not guess what way? Brion cried out in his heart over his own folly and shortsightedness.

'Why did you not drive him forth again?' he groaned.

'We went to do it, master, and his Honour turned on us like a mad thing, and bade us henceforth treat the man as his guest, and serve and honour him on

peril of dismissal. And from that time a kept the stranger always about him, and the devil came to possess him in his shape, so that one day a sent for me and Phineas, and, before witness of two lawyers a had summoned, told us a had bequeathed the Grange and all in it to his dearest friend, John Melton, and hoped, did the man survive him, a would continue to keep us all in his service. And that Melton promised, and so did we to serve him, his Honour was that pleading and gentle with us we had no heart to refuse. But, having said it, we never thought to lose him so soon —alackaday, alackaday!'

He cut short a very howl to mop his eyes with the back of his hand.

'Go on,' said Brion sadly, mourning to recall all that fateful premonition, which, in utmost caution's despite, had yet come to fulfil itself: and Nol continued, grievously snuffling:—

'After his Honour was laid in the ground, and we, his loving servants, had come home from the funeral, there was John Melton awaiting us, the Will he had won in his hand, and his lawyer backer beside him. And he dismissed us three then and there—me and Phineas and boy William—making least whit of his promise. And the lawyer upheld un by the law, so that we had naught for it but to obey, and out we trundled, with our packs and our wages. But as to Gammer Harlock, a axed her to stay on to keep house for him; and she consented, while we cursed her for a runagate, knowing naught of the dark purpose she had at heart—God rest her soul. Then Phineas and William they agreed that there was nothing for it but to jog for Lunnon, and me, if I would, with them. But that I

would not, thinking what it would be to you to come home unexpected, and find that devil in possession, and all of us gone without a word to tell you why. So, while they went, I bided on at Ashburton, getting work on a farm to keep me. And here have I been ever since, Master Brion, which is the whole truth; and God forgive me that it is wi' such news I have to greet thy return—and this dear lady at thy side.'

What was there to say, since the past could not be redeemed, unless and until, after Clerivault's thought, Death should come presently to roll it up backwards, like a long stretched drugget, obliterating all its dusty footprints? Brion put his hands on the shoulders of the faithful servant, and, looking affectionately into his eyes, 'Ah, Nol!' said he, 'big as thy body is, thy great soul must find in it but narrow house room. Now we are met, is it ever to part again?'

'Never till death,' cried the giant, in an explosion of love and gratitude; and so the pact was made.

'And now,' said Brion, looking dearly at his love, 'methinks, before we rest, I should go see this same rascal attorney, that hath played the petty devil to a greater rogue, and to whom Nol will conduct me.'

'Ay—right joyously!' cried the porter; 'and eke return him some of his own. Shall I take a cudgel, master?'

'Thy little finger will serve,' said Brion dryly.

Joan parted with him a little anxiously, urging diplomacy rather than violence; but he reassured her, answering for himself as a model of discretion.

And, indeed, Master Harnett, when found, discovered himself in too abjectly disarming a mood to invite retaliation. Terrified by events, and fawningly eager

to propitiate, he was only too ready to curry favour with the old heir by damning the pretensions of the new. The man was burnt to ashes, he said, and with him the Will which had made him master of the estate. His covetousness would never part with it, and, with its destruction, there was an end of his title. If Captain Middleton—as the rogue was pleased to call him—knew of another Will assigning him heir to the estate, that Will would now hold good. At the same time he would not have Captain Middleton assume an injustice of his Uncle. The deceased, as he knew for a fact, had made him in the later Will his residuary legatee—implying his succession to a sum which, if inconsiderable, owing to the testator's reckless habits, was yet some earnest of his thoughtfulness—and would no doubt have left him all, had not his mind been somewhat basely practised on. He hoped Captain Middleton would remember that, and perhaps his own share in venturing to suggest such a course to the testator.

He lied as to that, as Brion very well understood; but the information was as balm to an aching wound. It had not been the thought of poverty which had caused it, but of the estranged affection which could have condemned him to it. And now he knew. He thought nothing of the smallness of the bequest: the fact that it had been made at all was solace enough.

He left the attorney, with an expression of formal obligation to him so stiff and chill as almost to sound like an affront, and, being obsequiously bowed into the street, turned his steps for St Lawrence's graveyard, before going home to life and love. For home was wherever Joan was—that was a new and lovely thought.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A LAST DISCOVERY

'AFTER the storm, calm,' said Brion in a subdued level voice, his eyes brooding on the melancholy scene about him.

They had ridden over early from Ashburton, and had wandered through the desolate grounds, and seen the hopeless ruin of it all; and at the end, going into the trampled garden, had sat themselves down on a bench in a leafy corner, and turned to quiet discussion of the ways and means of the life before them. The place was quite deserted. Remote always, its loneliness, broken and death-smitten, had never seemed so stark a thing as now. An acrid smell of burning still lingered in the heavy Autumn air; no sound broke the stillness but the periodic rustle and crash of débris pitching from the crumbling walls.

'O, love, dear love!' sighed the girl: 'if only you could feel it so!'

He put his arm about her as they sat, and held her close to him.

'I can, I do, Joan. Now, listen to me. When I spoke of calm after storm, it was of my Uncle I was thinking, as much as of this desolate scene. Poor soul, it symbolizes him, gone down to peace and silence out of turbulent fires. Could I wish him restored to all that torment? No more, methinks, than I could wish these walls restored, to contain my innocent bride.

What if an evil fate was on this house, Joan? Almost I come to believe so, with her the poor wretch that hath perished under the ban she endowed it withal. A melancholy place hath it ever been, and dedicate to Death not less spiritual than material. For here have died hope and faith and will, which is a sadder decay than that of the body. Now thinking how perchance its blight might have come to fall upon my girl, it is better as it is, I cry in my heart, and see in it a very Providence to save her. Should I not be rejoiced thereat, since from this paltry holocaust rises my bird, my phœnix on bright secured wings? Not a house, or a city, or a continent, but a world against my Joan. Let it all go, sweet: I care not one jot: and I can view the sacrifice calmly, as you see. What were its wretched material worth, so it were held at my love's peril? If we have not enough beside to live on, I have great friends who will help me to the means. Believe me, child, I speak from my soul. I am glad that what is, is.'

She was so moved and gratified to find him in this happy mood of resignation, that she could not forbear, what was unusual with Joan, a little gush of tears. She clung to him, calling upon him by every proud endearing name to witness how she would never cease to try to vindicate his beautiful trust and love of her; and presently, a little overwrought, she rested in his arms, and a long silence fell between them. It was broken suddenly by Brion:—

'Joan?'

'My lord?'

'I have been thinking and puzzling.'

'Tell me.'

'That doomed rogue—that Melton. What made him so anxious to possess himself of the Grange?'

'Why? Why not?'

'He had no need, it seems, for the personal estate. It was the house and grounds alone he coveted.'

'And enough, i'faith.'

'But—so barren and profitless. No, I cannot understand. I——' a sudden thought striking him, he uttered a little sharp exclamation: 'Why, o' my verity and in good sooth, I never told you.'

'Told me what, Brion?'

'Where I hid him.'

'You said you hid him.'

'Yes, but where. Come, Joan—come along. I have something to show you.'

He communicated his sudden excitement to her, and she went with him, her eyes wide and her heart fluttering. He led her across the garden.

'What, to the old well-house, Brion?'

'Yes, to the old well-house, Joan. Don't you remember our visit, and my fright and your discovery? Well, I made a discovery of my own there later.'

'What, Brion?' She was all curiosity and eagerness —a child again.

'I will show you. Come.'

He held the branches of the thicket apart for her, and she stole in, wondering. It was all inviolate here, unapproached and unprofaned. No one of the countless footprints that marked the recent havoc had ventured within a score yards of the place. They entered, and the green closed behind them. It gave Brion a thrill to think of his latest visit. He hurried Joan through, into the stone belvedere, up to the wheel,

and, turning the great cylinder, found and lowered the movable panel and slipped it into its socket in the wall.

'Look down,' he said, with the conscious smile of a conjurer.

'O, Brion! What is it?'

'It is steps, dear, leading down to a little stone chamber, quarried deep under the floor.'

'Who put it there?'

'Nay, I know not. Not Fulke, I think: it must have been older than his time. But, whoever put it, I discovered it. It was there I hid John Melton, and therein he lay for three weeks before being removed to the house.'

'Let me go down and see. O, do!'

'Why, you baby! Well, wait while I enter first and kindle a light, if one remains. There should.'

He laughed to her, and, descending into the pit, sought about in the gloom for the bracket on the wall which he himself had placed there, and which he knew ought to contain every material for striking a fire. It was there, and amply provided—even more so than he seemed to remember—and it was no long while before he had a taper flaring in an iron sconce. Then he turned, and looked about him—and stood looking. What was there unfamiliar about this place, so intimately associated with his last days at home? Something—something significant of an occupation which did not wholly tally with his memories of the one he had ended. He recalled very distinctly the look of the chamber as he had last seen it—the mattress bed, the brazier, the heavy cloth pushed back by the invalid himself into the corner where he had lain. Now all

three lay flung apart in a heap, and, where the first and last had been, stood—what? Before he could stoop to examine, he heard Joan's voice entreating:—

'Brion! How long you are!'

He hurried to the steps and up them, and half emerging: 'Come down—quick!' he said. 'There is something odd here.'

She obeyed, readily enough—negotiating the narrow opening with grace but caution, while he stood below to guide her—and in another moment was wondering beside him in the chamber.

'It is not as I left it,' he said. 'Some one has been in here since then.'

'The stranger himself, mayhap,' she murmured, gazing open-eyed about her.

'Yes, but why? He could not while he lay a'bed; and afterwards he had no need. Was this brought by him?'

He strode a step, and lifted from the wall, against which it leaned, a short heavy crowbar. But he had hardly raised the thing, when he flung it down with an exclamation.

'What is that against the wall there?'

It showed out in the now brilliant flare of the taper—a broken and twisted slab of wood or metal, propped against the base of the wall in that angle of it where the bed had once lain. Brion took a step or two, and bent.

'It is heavy as lead,' he said. 'Why, it *is* lead!'—and, with a heave or two, he trundled the thing away, and let it drop upon the floor. In the place where it had stood was revealed an oblong opening, forming the mouth to a cavity of unknown depth. With a shout

of excitement he thrust in his hand, and, finding a hold for it in an iron stanchion affixed to some object, pulled with all his force. And, with his pull, there came sliding easily into the light a thing of very wonder.

Brion, rising erect, turned speechless to Joan, and she to him; and then with a sudden impulse they held to one another and both looked down. They saw a long wooden coffer of stout oak, measuring, it might be, three feet by one, with a depth of eighteen inches, running readily on little wheels, and full to the brim of gold and precious stones. He gasped, and looked into her face.

'The picaroon's booty,' he said, in an amazed, awe-struck voice—and could say no more. She brought him to his wits with a pull and whisper :—

'O, Brion!'

'And O, Joan!' he cried. 'Do you see? It was this secret the poor murdered maid unearthed; and, after her, Melton.'

Suddenly he broke from her, and darting for the slab, pulled it this way and that.

'I understand,' he cried—'I understand. Come here, Joan, while I show you.'

And when she ran to him, she saw. What might have been taken for a great stone at the base of the wall proved on examination to have been a thick leaden slab, made to fit like a door into its place, and so treated with roughcast on a heated and liquid surface as to be rendered indistinguishable from the other stones about it. By what device it had been made originally to open and disclose its inner secrets did not appear, the whole thing having been so hacked and wrenched to force it from its position as to destroy any clue that

might otherwise have been to the nature of its mechanism.

'But *how* did he discover it?' said Brion; 'since I know, from my own experiments, that no sounding would be enough.'

That interest seemed to absorb him for the moment above any other. He puzzled, clutching at his hair. Suddenly his face lit up:—

'I have it!' he cried jubilantly. 'It was the brazier set against the wall melted some of the lead and gave him the first of the clue. That was why I found it moved, the second time I went down to see him, and the bed put against the wall where it had been. 'Twas to hide from me his discovery. And afterwards he must have gone to work on the lead, and by degrees, melting and working a hole in it, learnt what was within. Then, when once his hands were free and he was secure of the house, he must have come back with that crowbar and finished what he had begun. It is all as clear as daylight, and eke the reason why he was so anxious, when I brought him forth, to see the clue to the secret chamber shut away. He feared even then that some overbold quidnunc might venture in, and, discovering the truth while he lay helpless in the house, ruin his whole design.'

He rose erect, stretching his shoulders, and letting out a great 'whoof' of exhilaration. The girl clapped her hands delightedly.

'His design!' she cried. 'Of course, Brion. It was to get sole possession of the house, and then, at his leisure, remove his plunder, thinking it could not be done with safety in any other way.'

'To be sure—not with the risks of discovery he would

run—and then, likely, to carry it off by sea. O, Joan !'

As by one consent, they turned to the box again, and Brion, kneeling beside it, plunged his hands, in a half fearful, half rapturous way, among the heavy glittering store. For the moment, and in their excited condition, only a cursory examination of the stuff was possible; but, such as it was, it seemed to reveal the departed buccaneer as a gentleman of fastidiously selective tastes. The mass of the treasure was in coin, and, so far as could be ascertained, gold coin exclusively. There were angels, broad-pieces, pieces of eight, moidores, nobles and others, all in lavish profusion. Some loose gems Brion turned up, sunk like sea-shells among the crevices of rocks, but more, and of greater value, appeared set in rings, brooches, buckles and the like ornaments. And never in the whole a gleam but of gold and the prismatic spars of jewels.

Suddenly Brion, with a start and sigh, rose from his investigation, and, seizing the stanchion, ran the chest back into its cache in the wall, and heaved the slab over the aperture, closing it away.

'Come, Joan,' he said: 'let us leave it for the nonce, and rise where we can breathe.'

She wondered a little; but obeyed him without a word, climbing again to the upper chamber, whither he followed her, after having extinguished the light. He made the wheel then secure, and together they threaded the thicket, and emerged once more into the light of day.

The sun, while they had been gone, had penetrated the heavy mists, and shone like a lifted Host high against the walls of Heaven. In that still and golden

light all the harsh acerbities of the scene stood wonderfully softened, and a great peace and quietness possessed everything. The two had walked but a little way, when Brion stopped, and taking the sweet face between his palms, and looking earnestly into the good blue eyes: 'Tell me, Joan,' said he: 'shall we leave it alone?'

'The gold, Brion?' she asked, wondering.

'Yes, the gold, Joan. I think of the blood and cruelty that went to its amassing; I think of the murder that secured it; I think of all the lives that have been sacrificed to make it ours at the last, and that a curse may be on it.'

'I think of the dear Providence, Brion, that brought us together to reach this very end, and of how it would be sin to cross its plain intentions; I think of a thousand kind things done to extenuate a thousand evils; and I think of my dear lord no longer wickedly accusing himself of being a pauper husband—as if love, like gingerbread ships, were the better for gilding—but rich as his love for his loving maid. O!'—she slipped her arms about his neck, and clung to him a little wildly —'it is not avarice in me, Brion, but only that—indeed, indeed it is. For a word of love a day I would follow you in rags to the world's end.'

'My Joan!' he said, in a full voice, and held her to him, whispering and fondling. For a little there was silence between them.

'Well,' he said at last; 'let it be, then. Ill-got shall be well-spent, and the curse, mayhap, turned into a blessing.'

'By us,' she said happily. She looked up, a sudden pink on her cheek, into his face. 'I have thought of

one thing, Brion. It is to help those—in some way—l-love children—so many like ourselves, but, unlike us, wretched and forsaken.'

'Yes, Joan, you good child.'

'Then—b-bustards they may call us, Brion, but cuckoos we will be.'

'Why cuckoos, Joan?'

'They are the birds, are they not, that look after other birds' young?'

His eyes opened, and a premonitory spasm seemed to flutter his chest.

'What is the matter, Brion?'

'Nothing, Joan.'

'O, I know you, i'faith! I have said something.'

'Whatever it was, I would not have it unsaid for all Joan's world.'

He kissed her, laughing against her very cheek; then turned instantly sober, and, putting his arm about her, led her on.

'So,' said he, 'it is settled, and let us forget it. What does it all weigh against the treasure of our love? For its safe-conduct and disposal, methinks I must take my friend the Ancient into my confidence, and in the meantime where it lies it is secure. Look, Joan—what gold a thousand times dearer greets thee!'

He had stopped her suddenly, pointing to a little flower at her very shoe point. It was a solitary primrose blossom, late or early there was no telling; but there it was, staring up at Joan. Brion lifted his head, and challenging the full round sun, 'Clerivault, Clerivault!' cried he—'Where England sets her feet! Look down and see the primrose break!'

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